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# General Assembly

Nineteenth Special Session

*Official Records*

8th plenary meeting
Thursday, 26 June 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

*President*: Mr. Razali Ismail . . . . . (Malaysia)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Çelem (Turkey), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Agenda item 8** *(continued)*

**Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21**

**The Acting President**: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jiří Skalický, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic.

*Mr. Jiří Skalický, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Skalický** (Czech Republic): I am particularly honoured to address the Assembly today in my capacity as Head of the Czech delegation to the nineteenth special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

My country associated itself with the statement made by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union last Monday.

We still expect this session of the General Assembly to bring about a number of concrete commitments, especially in the field of climate change. The Czech Republic subscribes to the three initiatives presented by the European Union: those on eco-efficiency, global water and sustainable energy for the future.

Moreover, given our painful experience with very serious forest degradation, we are devoting tremendous efforts to the recovery of our forests. This is why the Czech Republic supports the setting up of an intergovernmental negotiating committee in order to elaborate a strong global convention on forests.

To some extent, we might even be able to contribute to the most crucial discussion on the financing of sustainable development. The Czech Republic, being a new member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and a country associated with the European Union, would like gradually to change its status from that of a recipient country to that of a donor country, as well as to launch its own programme of technical assistance. We are ready and able to assist developing countries on many environmental issues, from water-supply schemes and freshwater protection to sustainable forestry and combating desertification.

Ever since the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development was established in 1992, the Czech Republic has participated in its work. We consider the Commission to be the most important global forum for sustainable development. The Czech Republic co-chaired the Commission from 1993 to 1994, and we are renewing our membership starting from 1998.

As to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Czech Republic — as a member of its Governing Council — is fully in favour of strengthening its role in dealing with global environmental issues, in

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accordance with its mandate. We hope that the current debate on UNEP's governing structure and programme priorities will result soon in a revival of confidence and the enhanced authority of the organization. We praise UNEP for initiating and coordinating the preparations for major environmental conventions, and we hope that it will continue this activity in the future. My country is an active party to a majority of those conventions, with the exception of the Convention to Combat Desertification. I strongly believe that exception will change in the very close future.

Let me now emphasize some priority areas and points of special importance for our delegation. Implementation is the key word today, and we will have to move from pure rhetoric to concrete action. For implementation we will need well-adapted tools and appropriate measures and criteria for taking stock of the progress made so far.

This is why we would like to play an active role in developing and testing an appropriate set of indicators which would enable us to measure more precisely and in a comparative way the changes and progress made in selected environmental issues in the field of sustainable development. Later this year, the Czech Republic will host two workshops on indicators, in collaboration with Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and UNEP.

Two types of instruments for the implementation of sustainability principles are probably the most important: economic instruments and instruments for raising public awareness. We are active in both areas, and besides theoretical progress we can also offer some practical results which might be useful for other countries and regions.

We appreciate the fact that the wording of the final document in the field of chemical safety is much stronger than it was before. The Czech delegation considers the problem of the increasing number of chemicals entering the environment as a serious hazard to health and ecosystems. We would also like to express our concern over the emerging problem of endocrine disrupters and the permanent flow of obsolete chemicals to developing countries, which pose a threat to our sustainable future.

If our next meeting takes place in five years' time, it will be in the next millennium. Only in the second half of the twentieth century have people gradually realized that unbalanced, ruthless economic development and technical progress that ignores the threats to our environment and the vital function of the globe are a self-defeating philosophy. Expensive and painful retrospective measures seem to avoid the worst, but evidently that is not sufficient. Let us hope that this special session of the United Nations General Assembly will invigorate the world on its path towards truly sustainable development.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic for his statement.

*Mr. Jiří Skalický, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Oscar Ceville, Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama.

*Mr. Oscar Ceville, Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Ceville** (Panama) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The delegation of Panama enthusiastically joins in the warm and well-deserved congratulations previous speakers have conveyed to the President from this rostrum.

We see efforts to move sustainable development from "agenda" to "action" as a priority, and Panama has taken significant steps in that direction.

In terms of legislation, major legal instruments have been adopted to provide the country with an appropriate legal framework so that it can forge ahead in its economic and social development, as well as in the environmental aspects of sustainable development. At present, we are drafting a general law on the environment.

At the institutional level, we have set up a National Council for Sustainable Development, which is attached to the Office of the Presidency of the Republic and promotes and coordinates gradual change in the quality of life of the citizens of Panama.

Panama has introduced its first equality plan, known as the Plan of Action: Women and Development, which is designed to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. To this end, we have established national agencies, such as the National Directorate for Women and the National Council for Women.

With regard to the role to be played by municipalities in this strategy, the national Government, under the leadership of the President of the Republic, Ernesto Pérez Balladares, is developing the programme called Municipalities for the Twenty-first Century. It combines community participation and self-management in social development projects for the poorest municipalities in the country.

My Government's efforts have also focused priority attention on health care. Its modern and practical approach has led to verifiable successes in rates of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality and the life expectancy of Panamanians.

My delegation places special emphasis on the eradication of poverty. In our view, the poor of the earth will determine the fate of the world. Many countries are worse off now than they were in 1980. Millions of human beings are buffeted daily by misfortunes deriving from hunger, malnutrition and disease, which are compounded by ignorance and despair.

Poverty is generating unsustainable disparities around the world as the result of an unequal distribution of wealth. Sustainability requires that the benefits of development reach all peoples of the world and all sectors of the population in each country.

In the field of biodiversity, national efforts have been stepped up for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. This has been done through support for the modernization of the national system of protected areas, which make up approximately 25 per cent of my country's territory.

Furthermore, the national Government has created the indigenous districts of Kuna Yala, Emberaa Wuonaan, Madugandí and Ngobe Bugle, thus guaranteeing the rights of peoples to their lands and respect for their ancestral cultures and values. The total area of lands under collective indigenous regimes and protected areas accounts for 40 per cent of national territory.

The issue of fresh water is on our agenda and is linked with my country's future responsibility for administering, operating and protecting the Panama Canal, whose freshwater supply comes from its hydrographic basin, which also provides drinking water for more than 50 per cent of the country's population.

Panama wishes to point out to this forum, as we have in others, that we have taken the institutional and legal measures to meet this responsibility. Moreover, we take this opportunity to reiterate to the international community the invitation extended by our national Government to take part in the Universal Congress on the Panama Canal, which will be held from 7 to 10 September 1997.

For a maritime country like Panama, the sea's resources are an important part of our development potential. Accordingly, we are promoting a programme to assess populations of commercial marine species in order to ensure their sustainable use and take appropriate measures to regulate it.

My delegation hopes that special attention will be given to measures aimed at reducing gas emissions that damage the atmosphere. This is one of the central topics on which little progress has been made in global terms. We hope that the third session of the Conference in Kyoto can provide the springboard for realistic, accessible and equitable goals making it possible to reduce gas emissions.

In the last five years, Panama has endorsed regional initiatives, and we are working in the framework of those initiatives in a spirit of brotherhood to go beyond the phase of proposals and arrive at the stage of action and results. The Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America is one such example.

Our experience with the Central American Convention on Forests shows the importance and efficiency of ranking priorities and actions in this sphere at the global level. We therefore support the continued work of the Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Panel on Forests, which is also looking into the possibility of negotiating an international legally binding instrument.

Panama is joining the World Trade Organization fully convinced that free and organized trade should be conducted in a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity, should be environmentally sound and should be a truly integral part of sustainable development, without barriers, discrimination or favouritism.

With regard to the future of the Global Environment Facility, my delegation is of the view that it needs adequate, sustainable and predictable resources. We also believe that the task of sustainable development needs the support of a global authority and that we should avoid

legislative and institutional fragmentation. The regional presence of this body needs to be strengthened so that regional priorities can be addressed.

With a dynamic vision of the concept of sustainable development contained in Agenda 21, Panama's activities are being carried out within a global and local framework in order to leave to our children and teenagers, as their legacy for the next millennium, a healthy environment in which they can develop to their full potential and can contribute efficiently to the development of humankind when their time comes.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama for his statement.

*Mr. Oscar Ceville, Vice-Minister of the Presidency of Panama, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq.

*Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Aziz** (Iraq) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I should like to convey warm greetings and to express our hope that this special session will succeed in achieving its objectives in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and in harmony with the fundamental principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration, which affirmed the strong link between the environment and development.

This special session comes five years after the Rio Earth Summit. It is regrettable that, since then, no substantial steps have been taken to reach the goals set by the Summit, especially those of the developing countries. On the contrary, the world today is witnessing attempts to marginalize and isolate the developing countries by various means, such as depriving them of their resources, obstructing their scientific and technological development and withholding environmentally clean technology. Certain developed countries are still reluctant to fulfil their obligations and commitments to stimulate sustainable development in developing countries and are resorting increasingly to coercive economic measures as a means for political and economic intimidation.

Iraq is in the forefront of countries with a deep-rooted legacy of stressing the cultural linkage between development and the environment. The legal provisions regulating aspects related to the environment in the first-known legal texts of the Babylonian codes are clear evidence of this. In more recent times, and consistent with its heritage, Iraq accomplished a great deal in the 1970s and 1980s in raising the standard of living of its citizens, establishing the infrastructure for public services and industries, improving health conditions and raising the quality of education. As confirmed by reports of various international agencies, environmental conditions in Iraq were progressively improving.

However, these conditions in our country began to deteriorate with the onset of the military aggression in 1991 and the continuation of the iniquitous embargo imposed upon us for seven years now.

The military operations led by the United States of America against Iraq in 1991 aimed primarily at — in addition to many civilian targets — the destruction of the infrastructure directly linked to the living and health conditions of the population, as well as the environment. This was done through the bombing of power plants and other public utilities. The bombardments also led to a halt in services related to the provision of drinking water, sewerage, heavy-water treatment plants, irrigation and drainage pumping stations. This in turn deprived our citizens of the energy they needed, thereby forcing them to cut down trees to use as a source of energy. Moreover, the bombardment of oil wells, other oil facilities and a large number of factories led to the release of large quantities of gases, fumes and chemical substances and other contaminating materials into the environment.

The report of Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, who was sent by the Secretary-General to Iraq in March 1991 after the cessation of military operations, gave an account of the enormous damage inflicted upon the civilian sector of Iraq and the tragic consequences thereof.

Iraq has made great efforts to reconstruct what was destroyed. For example, we were able to rehabilitate our water purification plants to 50 to 60 per cent of their pre-war capacity. We were also able partially to reconstruct destroyed power plants and most of the destroyed civilian infrastructure.

However, the continuation of the cruel and comprehensive embargo is obstructing the full rehabilitation, functioning and maintenance of basic services at their normal capacity. This is due to a lack of

spare parts, which has in turn led to a shortage and deterioration of the quality of drinking water. The rate of contamination of drinking water in some governorates has reached 50 per cent.

Scientific studies have confirmed with decisive evidence that the United States used depleted uranium shells in the military operations against Iraq. This exposed vast areas of Iraq to lethal radioactive contamination. Mysterious medical cases have been recorded, such as congenital malformations, bone deformities, unexplained hair loss and strange skin diseases suffered by persons who were near the area where those shells fell during the bombardments. Moreover, cases of leukaemia among children are on the increase.

After the ceasefire, the American forces blew up depots containing chemical weapons in areas under their occupation in southern Iraq in an irresponsible way that did not conform to scientific considerations applicable to such situations. That in turn led to the chemical contamination of populated areas.

The deliberate acts of the United States, which aimed at inflicting destruction on Iraq in 1991, and its insistence on maintaining the iniquitous embargo have seriously set back environmental conditions in Iraq and have led to a grave erosion of living standards and health and education conditions and a huge decline in public services. For example, in the field of health, infant mortality rates between 1990 and 1995 increased from 25 to 95 per 1,000 live births. During the same period, the mortality rate of children under five increased from 45 to 127 per 1,000. My delegation has distributed a detailed report on the consequences of these conditions, which we hope will be studied carefully.

The oil-for-food agreement has not yet led to a tangible improvement of the situation. The agreement has not been implemented, in fact, due to the suspension of a large number of contracts for food, medicine and civilian needs by the American delegation in the Sanctions Committee. Moreover, it is a confirmed fact that, even if that agreement were to be implemented in full, it would not lead to a serious improvement of the living and health conditions of the population because of the insufficiency of the funds generated by it and the high rate of deductions therefrom. As for the funds allocated for purposes related directly or indirectly to the environment, such as the sectors of water, sewage and electricity, they are no more than 5 per cent of the total amount generated under the scheme. Most of the contracts relating to this area are currently on hold.

Despite these harsh conditions, which have been imposed upon Iraq for seven years now, efforts to improve the environment and to pursue development have not ceased. Last year, we promulgated new legislation to protect and improve the environment and to regulate the strong relationship between the environment and development.

We call upon the international community fully to shoulder its responsibility to eliminate all the obstacles facing Iraq in its programmes and efforts in the field of the environment and development. This falls within our common endeavour to create a better environment for future generations, in accordance with Agenda 21, its principles and the Rio Declaration. The lifting of the iniquitous embargo is the first step on the correct path, especially since Iraq has implemented its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions. This path would enable Iraq to use its resources to secure the requirements of protecting the environment, realizing development, ensuring adequate standards of living for its people and removing the injustice inflicted upon it.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq for his statement.

*Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Ljerka Mintas Hodak, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia.

*Ms. Ljerka Mintas Hodak, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Ms. Mintas Hodak** (Croatia): Five years ago in Rio de Janeiro, Croatia participated in a United Nations conference for the first time. That conference came at a time when my country was facing an imposed war that caused immense suffering and economic and social disruption. The war was also the main cause of environmental damage in Croatia. Nevertheless, at that time we abided by our principles and beliefs — as we do today — in joining in the efforts of the world community in its goal of moving forward towards the permanent sustainability of our environment for the generations to come.

While the Rio Conference was the catalyst for a global environmental partnership for the coming century, negative trends in global pollution have continued to multiply. Humankind is rapidly reaching the threshold of sustainability, and we must adjust urgently.

Croatia's outlook in relation to the advancement of sustainable development is the result of various factors, including its geographic location in Central and Mediterranean Europe, its transition economy and its recovery from a war of aggression that has made reconstruction and social renewal necessary. All of these key issues for Croatia are linked to the three cornerstones of sustainable development.

Immediately following Rio, the Croatian Parliament issued a declaration on the protection of the environment. The commitments in our declaration, like those in the Rio documents, need to be continually renewed if they are to be more than mere gestures of good faith.

The diverse aspects of Croatia's environment and the specific mix of its geography — from Danubian to karst, from alpine to Mediterranean — simultaneously make for wonderful diversity and significant challenges. Many of the pressures and dangers facing our environment we cannot address alone. We share a joint responsibility with our neighbours to ensure that our common environmental heritage is unharmed. We share the Adriatic Sea with other States that have had a significant impact upon its quality. Our forests, soil and littoral karst environments are under threat, with 85 per cent of the pollution affecting them coming from sources abroad.

Croatia has been a constant participant in the development of the Mediterranean and Danubian regional programmes and remains open to greater regional and international cooperation. This approach is a practical response to the fundamental realization that environments do not stop at national borders but rather transcend them, making it the responsibility of all States to respond accordingly. In this context, Croatia welcomes the process of the increasing regionalization of United Nations activities for the implementation of Agenda 21, which will allow closer attention to be paid to the specific problems of individual regions.

Seeking greater institutional efficiency is important, and this process must keep pace with the efficiency that is sought to be achieved in the economic and environmental fields. Therefore, Croatia supports initiatives such as that of the Minsk Conference to request the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe to prepare periodic reviews of the progress made by its member countries in achieving sustainable development. We also participate actively in the "environment for Europe" process.

Although its impact upon the problem has been small in global terms, Croatia has taken active steps to protect the ozone layer. Croatia has also taken responsibility in seeking the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, in accordance with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Furthermore, stringent domestic legislation prohibits the import of dangerous waste products into Croatia. We wish also to stress the role of sound energy policies in combating the threat of global warming and to reaffirm our commitment to the use of energy sources in ways that respect the atmosphere, human health and the environment as a whole.

Over the past seven years the Croatian Government has created a legal and institutional structure for the implementation of sustainable development. We are in the process of refining our legislation at the level of application and implementation.

A significant realization was arrived at in Rio — that in order to be truly successful, nine key groups within society must participate in sustainable development efforts. Croatia supports the transfer of part of the implementation responsibility to regions, municipalities and towns. I am pleased to state that the number of local initiatives and achievements in the field of environmental protection in Croatia is increasing. The activities of, and cooperation with, the 188 non-governmental organizations engaged in environmental protection in Croatia have been valuable.

In the economic sphere, the Croatian Business Council for Sustainable Development was founded in 1996. It has attracted most of Croatia's largest enterprises, which have agreed to accept the Business Charter on Sustainable Development. Also founded were the Cleaner Technologies Centre and the Centre for Transfer of Technologies, which have attracted leading firms and organizations in the field. The Social Economic Council, a new tripartite body consisting of representatives of the Government, employers and unions, is in the process of being formed. That body will facilitate a balanced and consensual approach to issues related to the economy.

Five years after Rio, Croatia wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the principles accepted there and to show that it has taken domestic policy measures to implement those principles. At the same time, it is clear that this is still an evolving process.

Croatia supports more resolute action in keeping with the principle of "polluter pays" in the establishment of an efficient mechanism for addressing the problems of cross-border pollution and regulating compensation. Particular responsibility lies with developed countries, which cause approximately 80 per cent of the pollution on our planet.

Croatia also supports a practical approach in recognizing the differences and individual characteristics of States in the sphere of sustainable development and the adoption of appropriate measures to address them.

Croatia and other countries with economies in transition are aware that not all of the effects that an unrestrained free market can have are favourable. This is particularly true in the case of the environment. In this respect, those countries will have to create their own institutional balancing mechanisms. The experience and technology available in developed countries will be of importance in this task.

Finally, let me assure the Assembly that Croatia will remain true to its commitment to the common responsibility of all States in working towards a sustainable future for our planet.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia for her statement.

*Ms. Ljerka Mintas Hodak, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka, EGH, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya.

*The Honourable Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka, EGH, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Musyoka** (Kenya): Allow me to begin by congratulating Ambassador Razali on his election as President of this special session.

Since the Rio Earth Summit, the world has witnessed tremendous changes that have adversely affected the implementation of Agenda 21. The environment has become increasingly vulnerable to degradation as a result of unprecedented conflicts, poverty, disease and disasters, among other factors.

The Rio summit set out a plan of action that was expected to place environment at the forefront. Five years later, Agenda 21 has met with constraints that have impeded its effective implementation in developing countries, particularly in Africa. Poverty remains a major constraint on the socio-economic development of our countries, threatening their political stability and in turn causing the degradation of the environment.

Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are a major drawback to the realization of good environmental management practices. We know that the highest per capita resource use and waste generation occur in developed countries; similar patterns are now emerging in developing countries. As we approach the twenty-first century, it is imperative that we change our production and consumption patterns.

The situation is worsened by the transfer of unsound and unfriendly environmental technologies. The international community, particularly the industrialized countries, have an obligation to provide the developing countries with access to sound technologies and the corresponding know-how on favourable terms.

My delegation associates itself with the views expressed by the Chairman of the Group of 77, speaking on behalf of that Group and China. Kenya believes that the future of our planet is in our hands, and hopes that the outcome of this session will be accorded the seriousness it deserves. We note that decisions of past international conferences have not been fully honoured. For instance, the implementation of the United Nations target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance has been declining; the figure now stands at about 0.25 per cent. This has exacerbated the deterioration of the global environment. My delegation hopes that, this time around, the international community will honour the commitments, agreements and targets agreed upon in Rio.

In Africa, desertification and drought continue to threaten the livelihood of the people, the animals and the environment. We are witnessing tremendous losses in biological diversity and dramatic changes in climatic

conditions. In this regard, Kenya has signed and ratified the three sustainable-development conventions: on biological diversity, on climate change and on desertification. The need for the international community to implement the commitments in those conventions cannot be overemphasized. We are convinced that all pending matters in the conventions and processes should be concluded before we consider negotiating any other conventions.

The importance given to environmental issues was demonstrated in 1972, when the international community, through the United Nations, held the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which saw the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Kenya is proud to have been associated with that Conference and feels honoured to have been selected by the international community to host the headquarters of UNEP in Nairobi. The factors and objectives that made Nairobi the location for the UNEP secretariat to serve the world's environmental needs are still valid today.

We note that UNEP needs to be revitalized and strengthened by streamlining its administrative and financial management. In addition, UNEP requires adequate and predictable financial resources in order to fulfil its mandate. We therefore welcome UNEP Governing Council decision 19/1 B, on UNEP governance, and the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, which reaffirmed the role and mandate of UNEP as the principal United Nations body in the field of environment.

As host country to both UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, we are concerned that the two United Nations programmes in Nairobi continue to suffer from inadequate funding and capacity underutilization despite their enormous potential. It is imperative that General Assembly resolutions that require meetings to be held at the headquarters of a given body are adhered to.

Kenya is concerned about a proposal to establish a new world environmental organization. We view this move as not being in line with the spirit demonstrated in Stockholm. UNEP remains underutilized and strapped for cash. It is therefore difficult to comprehend how this proposal would fit within the ongoing restructuring of the United Nations aimed at avoiding duplication.

Under the able leadership of His Excellency President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, Kenyans are becoming increasingly aware of the need to manage their natural resources in a sustainable manner, as the environment is our greatest asset. Our environmental policies are therefore being developed in line with the Kenya National Environment Action Plan, which contains a broad strategic framework for environmental conservation and management. We are convinced that public awareness and environmental education will enhance public participation in environmental management. It is against this background that Kenya is taking the major step of introducing environmental education as an integral part of the school curriculum.

The Government hence intends to create a Great Rift Valley conservancy, where the skills of the people and land-use practices will be harmonized. Along with that, the Government is working out modalities that will address the decline of the marine biological diversity along the coastline and in the fresh water lakes. We wish to appeal to the international community to make available the resources necessary to augment our national efforts to realize the objectives of sustainable development as called for in Agenda 21.

Finally, as we approach the next millennium, let us reflect on the commitments we made five years ago at Rio and on our expectations of these. We need to reexamine our approaches to the utilization of the finite resources of planet Earth. This is a responsibility that lies with all of us, and together we must resolve to leave behind a safe and sound legacy for future generations.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya for his statement.

*The Honourable Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka, EGH, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Kenya, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Arian Starova, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania.

*Mr. Arian Starova, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Starova** (Albania): The convening of this special session five years after the Rio summit indicates

the importance that Member States attach to the protection of the environment, an enormous challenge facing us and the generations to come. We are convinced that, in addition to reviewing the implementation of the commitments set out in Agenda 21, this session will help enhance environmental action on the part of States, the United Nations and its entire system, and regional organizations.

The Summit for Social Development, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and the regional conferences have strengthened the international coordination of efforts for the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration.

Since the Rio Conference, Governments have adopted national plans for the environment and have included environmental concerns in their development strategies. The World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies have reviewed their programmes and projects, making them more environmentally oriented.

Problems which require urgent action remain. We have much to worry about: increasing shortages of clean water, climate change and deforestation. In our opinion, this session has reconfirmed the existence of political will on the part of States to deal seriously with these problems. It is now up to us to act accordingly by adopting the needed legal instruments.

We support the further strengthening of the role of the United Nations system for more effective international action by assisting States' efforts to cope with environmental issues and put development on a healthier environmental basis. We also deem the regional approach of United Nations actions to be the proper way of addressing environmental concerns. In this context, it is necessary that the programmes in the framework of the United Nations system take into consideration the specific needs of countries with economies in transition.

In these last years, there have been significant developments in the institutional and legal frameworks of environmental activities in Albania through the adoption and implementation of a national strategy for the environment in the fields of education and public participation in international cooperation. The principle of sustainable development has increasingly become the guideline of our policies, which seek economic, social and environmentally sound solutions.

In 1992, the Government reorganized the National Committee for the Protection of the Environment and increased its personnel, while establishing for the first time twelve regional environmental agencies. Separate sections were organized within several ministries and local government in order to reconcile economic policies with environmental considerations. For the first time, in 1995, an environmental engineering section was opened at the University of Tirana where specialists in this field are trained.

The legal framework already includes a number of laws and other legal acts for the protection of the environment. I can mention as particularly important the law on the protection of the environment, laws concerning biodiversity, forests and forestry police, the protection of wild fauna, hunting, fishing, water, and the decision of the Government on hazardous waste. Albania is now party to several conventions on the environment, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Our focus for the future will follow two main lines: first, the enforcement of the existing laws and those Conventions, and secondly, the broadening of the legal framework and adherence to other relevant international instruments. In January 1994, the Council of Ministers adopted a first national plan of action on the environment, based on our national strategy for the protection of the environment and with the support of the World Bank. The plan, the implementation of which started in 1994, offers concrete action and immediate solutions as well as medium- and long-term guidance for environmental issues, while defining concrete tasks for environmentally-oriented institutions and organisms all over the country. More than 40 environmentally-oriented non-governmental organizations are active in Albania today, despite our complete lack of a tradition in the field. The activities of those organizations have helped to increase public awareness on issues concerning the environment. It is positive to note that their cooperation with the relevant State institutions remains at a satisfactory level.

In all their efforts to protect the environment, the Albanian institutions have had the full support of the United Nations system and various European structures. In this context, I would like to note with gratitude the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank, the European Union and

the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Their assistance has been both technical and financial, and we hope that these organizations and institutions will maintain their contributions in the future.

Despite renewed efforts, serious problems remain, such as the deforestation of tens of thousands of hectares of forest area as a result of illegal logging, land erosion, and urban pollution due to improperly controlled activities on the part of private enterprises and the old structure of energy sources. The problem of rehabilitating the running water system remains urgent. The rapid development of the construction industry has not been guided by environmental considerations.

To these problems were added the negative effects on the environment that resulted from the events of these last months in Albania. The current security situation in the country has created ample room for criminal actions on the part of irresponsible elements, resulting in damage to forests and other natural resources. We hope that these problems will receive due attention as soon as Albania returns to normalcy. On 29 June, Albanians will vote to elect a new Government. These elections will be crucial for the future of the country; hence the Government of National Reconciliation has done all in its power to organize the elections, while enjoying to this end the strong support of the international community, the United Nations and European structures such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

I would like to reaffirm the appreciation of the Government of National Reconciliation and of the Albanian people for the prompt action on part of the United Nations in response to the situation in my country, including in particular the Security Council's authorization of a multinational protection force for Albania and the extension of its mandate via resolution 1114 (1997).

**The Acting President:** I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania for his statement.

*Mr. Arian Starova, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Bin Said Al-Khayareen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar.

*Mr. Ali Bin Said Al-Khayareen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Al-Khayareen** (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Five years ago the Rio Conference faced many challenges. Believing that life on planet Earth had entered a critical stage, the Conference was able to meet those challenges after enormous efforts. Today, however, the challenges facing us are in fact more serious than ever before.

Indeed, what is needed now is action and implementation, not mere adoption of principles and recommendations. What is required of us now is to translate words and guidelines into concrete deeds that will transport this planet, with all its living beings and all its natural components, to a new phase, wherein development dominates and backwardness retreats. Needless to say, this will not happen unless and until all countries carry out the commitments of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21.

In this respect the State of Qatar has complied fully with the vision of Rio. In the years since then, it has acceded to the Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes, the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer, and the Montreal Protocol and its amendments, as well as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In addition, we were among the first signatories of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The State of Qatar, believing in the importance of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, has paid special attention to strengthening and further developing its environmental organs and bodies and enlarging their mandates in order to enable them to perform the roles they were entrusted with more efficiently. It has also modernized its environmental legislation, taking into account the provisions of international and regional environmental conventions, protocols and agreements.

It should be noted in this respect that Qatar has introduced environmental safety among the most important criteria for starting any industrial project in the country. At the same time, it has developed a strategy for dealing with hazardous industrial wastes.

What we aspire to achieve should be sustainable development in a balanced manner; one that takes into consideration, as a whole, all the environmental,

economic and social dimensions of this process, and recognizes the difference in levels of development between developed and developing countries and their widely varying capabilities. This should be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, with emphasis placed on the right of States to growth and progress without negative impacts on their development programmes or their social or economic stability.

In this context, we stress the importance of taking into account the special situation of developing countries which may be affected by conditions arising from the adverse effects of climate change. Consideration should also be given to those affected by the implementation of measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, as is the case with the developing countries that are highly dependent on income generated from the production, processing and export of oil. This was recognized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We would also like to underline the importance of dealing in a comprehensive manner with all greenhouse gases without limiting measures to carbon dioxide, taking into account the sinks and reservoirs of such gases. At the same time, care should be taken that none of the measures and policies related to reducing the emissions of such gases become a disguised barrier to international trade, since this would affect the open trade system which we regard as an effective means of achieving sustainable economic development.

In addition to the above, there are numerous other tributaries that flow into the process of achieving sustainable development, all of which require immediate action without undue delay. Such action includes the developed countries shouldering their historic responsibilities towards the environment and development by honouring their financial commitments, because reducing poverty in the world is in the interest of all, the rich as well as the poor.

Such action also includes the creation of a unified legal mechanism for the protection of the environment; the integration of the provisions of international conventions into national legislation; and compatibility between financial resources and the action required for the protection of the environment. Other elements include the spreading of environmental awareness, calling attention to the wasteful use of natural resources and strengthening environmental education by making it part of national educational curricula, and the promotion of wider participation by the private sector in the various fields of development.

Barely three years from now, the countries of this planet will be entering a new century. It will not be an exaggeration to state that all countries of the world are in the same boat. If it floats, all will survive. Should it sink, all will perish, be they developed or developing countries, rich or poor nations.

Therefore, while the State of Qatar looks forward to a better and brighter future, it appeals to all States of the world to strive earnestly and seriously towards that brighter future for us and for the coming generations. At the same time, it associates itself with all the honest efforts expressed by the Heads of States, Governments and delegations in their addresses before this special session.

**The Acting President**: I thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar for his statement.

*Mr. Ali Bin Said Al-Khayareen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Qatar, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President**: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

*Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Wehbe** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The political scientist MacKender once said that the world is like a copper ball: if it is struck anywhere on its surface, the repercussions will echo throughout the ball. In such a framework this special session of the General Assembly has convened to place us all before our responsibilities to preserve life and the future of generations to come.

Proceeding from this, let me remind the Assembly that our children in the occupied Arab territories — which include Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Syrian Golan, south Lebanon and the western Bekaa — are subjected to harsh Israeli practices that jeopardize the life, dignity, development and environment of man. The time has come for the voices of those children and their suffering to toll loudly so that they

may be heard by the United Nations and in every part of this world so that we may all know what grave harm and dangers Arabs face under Israeli occupation.

The environment and land are indivisible. If one State were to appropriate the lands of others by force, what role would the environment then have? If one's land is expropriated, what meaning does environment have for him? This applies to Israel, which practices aggression, confiscates Palestinian lands and appropriates them, continues to build settlements in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Syrian Golan, destroys the homes of Palestinians and uproots them from their lands, burns forests, cuts irrigation waters, appropriates water resources, uproots trees and uses poison gases.

Israel continues to change the environmental, geographic, historic and demographic characteristics of the occupied Arab lands. It imposes an economic siege on the people of those lands. We are facing grave difficulties which stand as obstacles to our efforts to protect the environment and avoid the damage resulting from its destruction. These are first and foremost due to the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab lands and increasing Israeli military capabilities. Among those is the fact that Israel has plants for the production of weapons of mass destruction, with nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons at the forefront. This is in addition to the production of many other conventional weapons, all of which are used against us. They are always a threat for expansion, occupation and further settlement.

Israel continues to refuse to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It persists in conducting a military nuclear programme outside the international regime to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, with the concomitant grave threat to the security, safety and environment of the peoples of the region now and in the future.

Furthermore, Israel has buried 52 tons of industrial nuclear and chemical waste in the occupied Arab territories. This bears the seeds of an environmental catastrophe throughout the entire Middle East. Therefore, and given people's right to live in dignity in a healthy, unpolluted environment, we call on the leaders present at this important international forum to bring pressure to bear on Israel to put an end to such actions and cease bringing harm to the lives and health of those living in the occupied territories.

On the basis of the guidelines of Agenda 21 and the mechanism for implementing them, the Syrian Arab Republic, due to the great importance attached by President Hafiz al-Assad to environmental and developmental issues, has acceded to the conventions stemming from the Earth Summit of 1992 and has implemented a number of the activities they provide for, despite the many difficulties facing us.

First, a comprehensive biodiversity survey has been undertaken in order to prepare a national strategy on biodiversity and programmes of action have been proposed for the preservation of biodiversity in Syria.

Second, in the field of climate change and the atmosphere, some industries have been converted to the use of materials that do not damage the ozone layer.

Third, the first stage of a comprehensive survey of the current environmental situation in the country has been completed, and priorities have been set for the preparation of a national strategy and an environmental programme of action. Symposiums to provide training in the field of the environment have been set up in order to ensure sustainability.

Fourth, the different State institutions have been working together to integrate environmental considerations into development plans, particularly the eighth five-year plan currently being prepared, and we have been assessing the environmental impact of all development activities in order to ensure that they are in line with Syria's environmental policies.

Fifth, a data bank is being set up by the Ministry of the Environment as a nucleus for an environmental data bank.

Sixth, we are carrying out a national study to identify arid areas and those threatened with desertification in Syria, and we have a new programme to study industrial pollution control.

Seventh, a new sanitation plant has been completed in Damascus, and we are looking at the possibility of building new sewage-processing plants in all governorates in Syria. There are plans to include water resource management in Syria in the activities of the Ministry of Irrigation. We are also working with the Ministry of Education to introduce environmental studies into curricula.

However, there are many difficulties facing us in implementing Agenda 21, the first of which is the lack of codification of environmental issues. Thus, we are preparing a national environmental law.

Secondly, the lack of testing equipment in the Ministry of the Environment prevents us from making precise studies. There is a lack of highly trained management staff and a shortage of technical means to face up to environmental challenges.

As we are preparing our priorities in Syria, we are seeking sources of financing for the different environmental projects. The Ministry of the Environment is cooperating with all national institutions in order to prepare a national water resource management plan given the importance of water resources and their environmental importance.

We are also cooperating with the Global Environment Facility in order to improve national capacity. Syria attaches great importance to forests and their development, in view of their importance for environmental balance and as national resources. They are the lungs of our cities, and we support the recommendation to the Commission on Sustainable Development to create an Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.

Syria supports international efforts to eradicate poverty, which is a major factor in the deterioration of the environment and natural resources. There are many obstacles before national sustainable development can be achieved, and there are other difficulties at the international level.

First, there is grave concern because the objectives that we agreed upon in Rio five years ago have still not been implemented. We continue to divide the world into rich or poor countries, countries of the North or the South. There are many promises that have not been fulfilled.

Secondly, there are many other negative factors, such as the burden of debt, poverty, unemployment, economic imbalances, threats to biodiversity, soil erosion and deforestation.

Thirdly, there is a reluctance to transfer advanced technology to developing countries in order to improve their environmental conditions.

Fourthly, there is grave concern with regard to the destructive effects of the dangerous, toxic and radioactive wastes that some States attempt to dump or bury in developing countries, as if our peoples should be the victims of industrial development.

More than ever before, our planet now needs courageous political will to implement the promises and commitments enshrined in all international resolutions in the field of environment and sustainable development.

Financial means must be provided to developing countries, and technology must be transferred to them in preferential terms. We must also change the patterns of consumption and production. Once again, we stress the need for practical and legal mechanisms to combat the transport of toxic waste, nuclear or otherwise, to developing countries.

Let us protect human lives from disease and death. If the industrialized, developed world truly wants to participate in improving the environment, we have an opportunity to find the political will to achieve equality in green spaces, which should not be limited to developed countries. There is an urgent need for more courageous environmental initiatives within the United Nations, particularly in the area of forests.

If developing countries are to be full and effective partners in saving our planet we need, first and foremost, to improve our scientific means. Expertise and knowledge, along with advanced technology, must be transferred to developing countries.

This is one of the main points contained in Agenda 21. One cannot talk of sustainable development and the environment without looking into the problems of developing countries, including the problems they face because of the terms of international trade and the transfer of resources.

We attach great importance to changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Just and comprehensive peace, development and the protection of the environment are all complementary and indivisible. In this context, we believe that aggression and the occupation of the land of others by force will paralyse efforts to obtain sustainable development. General Assembly resolution 51/190 reasserted the principle of the permanent sovereignty of peoples under foreign occupation over their natural resources. It reasserted the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and the people of the Syrian Arab Golan to benefit from their natural and other economic resources. The resolution stresses

that any violation of this right is illegal and that armed aggression and foreign occupation destroy the environment and sustainable development, which is in accordance with principle 23 of the Rio Declaration.

Aggressor States must therefore respect international law and United Nations resolutions on environmental protection.

Let us embark on the path of renewed hope as we stand on the threshold of the twenty-first century. Let us create a new world of peace, security and stability in which the hopes and aspirations of all the children of the world will be fulfilled in a bright future.

I wish this historic meeting full success in its work.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement.

*Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, Chairman of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** May I remind representatives that statements are limited to seven minutes.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sadyk Safaev, Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan.

*Mr. Sadyk Safaev, Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Safaev** (Uzbekistan): This special session of the General Assembly is undoubtedly a representative forum addressing, perhaps, the most important problems of the contemporary world and the future of the planet, problems that are a matter of concern for all mankind.

Half a decade has passed since the Rio de Janeiro Conference on environment and sustainable development and it has become more evident than ever before that the Conference was one of the most important and meaningful events of contemporary international affairs.

The Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan highly appreciates the importance of the Rio de Janeiro Conference and intends to participate most actively in international cooperation, as well as to ensure the unconditional implementation of its own national programme, elaborated in consideration of the main documents adopted within the framework and in the light of the Rio de Janeiro Conference. Uzbekistan participates actively in the implementation of the United Nations projects which are carried out in Central Asia in this sphere. The National Commission on Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan is functioning successfully. Special bodies on the implementation of the Conventions on biological diversity, desertification and the protection of the ozone layer have been established in Uzbekistan. However, for well-known reasons, most of the problems which are being discussed today are critical for Uzbekistan as well.

As is the case with all newly independent States, Uzbekistan faces the challenges of sustainable development, the structural reconstruction of the economy and the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs — in other words, economic progress. It is natural and justified that the developing countries strive to achieve higher standards of living, which require expanded economic production and the intensification of industry and agriculture. And now we must answer the question: How do we achieve harmony between the natural and justified aspirations of the countries and regions to ensuring rapid economic progress and the need to carefully preserve the environment, natural and climatic, and the ecological and energy balance?

Nowadays, one can say without exaggeration that in Central Asia there has come into being one of the most dangerous zones of ecological disaster. There is a constantly increasing threat of a shortage and qualitative degradation of land. Desertification caused by human activity is taking place and the salinization of the lands is increasing. At the same time, the shortage of water is becoming more and more critical. A great danger in the region is imposed by radioactive waste stockpiles, a considerable number of which are located along rivers that carry their waters to towns and villages.

The shrinking of the Aral Sea has turned out to be one of the most pressing ecological problems — one might say a national disaster. However, it is far from being the problem of Uzbekistan alone or solely that of the Central Asian countries. It qualifies as one of the most serious ecological catastrophes in the history of mankind on our planet. Today, some 35 million people are living under the direct impact of this catastrophe. In the course of the past 20 to 25 years — within the life of one generation — we have witnessed the death of the whole Sea, one of the biggest landlocked water reservoirs of the planet.

In 1962, the level of the Sea was 1.6 times greater than it is today, the water volume 2.7 times greater. The mineral content in the water has increased fourfold. As a result, it is no longer one sea, but rather two lakes. Its shores are 60 to 80 kilometres from the original coastline.

In the 1980s in the Aral Sea area and on all the surrounding territories, sand storms began to be observed. The dust trails are as long as 400 kilometres in length and 40 kilometres in width, with dust storms stretching as far as 300 kilometres away. Experts estimate that 15 to 75 million tons of dust rise into the atmosphere annually.

All this has brought about a serious change of climate in the Aral Sea area. The growing deficit of water and its deteriorating quality has resulted in the degradation of the lands and plants.

With the shrinking of the Aral Sea, there has appeared a whole complex of ecological, socio-economic and demographic problems which are international and global in scope because of their origin and serious consequences. Today, the Aral problem has turned out to be a planetary issue and has already managed to break the biological balance and have a negative impact on the genetic bases of the population on the vast territories.

Aware of the seriousness of the Aral Sea problem and of the need to take urgent measures to save it, the Governments of the Central Asian Republics and a number of international organizations set up an international fund to save the Aral Sea. They adopted a Declaration of the States of Central Asia on the problems of the sustainable development of the Aral Sea basin.

However, it is evident that without urgent measures on the part of the international community of nations and without the necessary aid from world organizations, it will be impossible to solve the problem relying solely on the opportunities available to the countries of the region. Alongside concrete assistance on the part of international organizations, an important contribution to the matter of saving the Aral Sea and the sustainable development of the region would be to elaborate a United Nations convention on the sustainable development of the Aral Sea basin and to declare 1998 as the year of environmental protection in Central Asia under the aegis of the United Nations.

Bearing in mind the political statement that is going to be adopted as a very important outcome of this session, we welcome the agreed understanding of the international community that, alongside socio-economic development and environmental protection, peace and security are the obligatory preconditions of sustainable development. Indeed, can we speak about comprehensive sustainable development with conflicts and wars still raging? In this regard, in our opinion, the initiative to declare Central Asia free of nuclear weapons is worth paying attention to. We are grateful for and highly appreciate the Member countries' support of this initiative.

To conclude, I would like to mention that the Republic of Uzbekistan attaches great importance to the work of this special session, as well as to the continuation of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the United Nations Environment Programme. We hope that this session will make a concrete contribution to the matter of solving the difficult problems that we all face on the eve of the new millennium.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan for his statement.

*Mr. Sadyk Safaev, Chairman of the delegation of Uzbekistan, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan.

*Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mrs. Ataeva** (Turkmenistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me, Sir, to congratulate you on your election to your high post and to wish you every success. The delegation of Turkmenistan welcomes the open dialogue and businesslike atmosphere of this session and is prepared to contribute to its effective outcome.

It has been noted at this session that progress has been made in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the decisions of the Rio Conference held in 1992. At last mankind has become aware of its responsibility to future generations for the preservation of the environment as well as of the need to take urgent measures to confront the existing situation. The United Nations considers this problem to be one of its foremost priorities and has developed and undertaken specific measures to implement conventions adopted in this regard.

Following the Rio Conference, each subsequent forum has undoubtedly enriched and specifically

prioritized individual areas of activity. However, the dimensions of this global problem are so enormous that they will require still greater efforts, not only on the part of the United Nations but also on the part of each country, as well as constructive international cooperation. We hope that the current special session will provide fresh impetus to international cooperation in protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development and that it will also contribute to the successful solution of this problem.

Awareness of the importance of environmental problems has enabled the President of Turkmenistan, His Excellency Mr. Niyazov, to take a number of important steps towards resolving these vitally important problems. Work has been initiated to update legal norms in the field of environmental protection, and a number of new laws and a health code have been adopted. The Lukman programme, aimed at the adoption of thoroughgoing preventive measures, has been worked out. Together with the United Nations Development Programme, we have completed the elaboration of our national environmental protection programme. Turkmenistan has acceded to and ratified the main package of international conventions and treaties dealing with environmental issues and is actively developing international cooperation.

A start has been made, but the country still faces numerous environmental problems. At present Turkmenistan is focusing attention on ensuring balanced development of the economy and public health. For example, work will continue to provide high-quality drinking water to the population of Turkmenistan in an area that is experiencing an environmental disaster — the Aral Sea basin — and to eliminate the negative impact of the Caspian Sea transgression to the west of the country. Measures have been taken to improve productivity and stability in agriculture and animal husbandry. Special efforts will focus on the rational use of natural resources, combating desertification, water and wind erosion, swamping and flooding. Plans are under way to develop a network of specially protected areas and the assisted conservation of rare and endangered species of flora and fauna. All this requires significant capital investment.

An Institute of Desert Research has been established in the country, given the fact that 80 percent of Turkmenistan's territory consists of deserts. Following the initiative of President Niyazov, the country has elaborated a national programme to combat desertification. The Institute is undertaking joint projects together with Israel's Ben Gurion Institute of Desert Research in Israel, and is also carrying out a project, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, to establish a scientific research centre and a project of the Commission on Sustainable Development aimed at saving the Aral Sea.

*The President took the Chair.*

A number of joint international projects are also being implemented. We are an active participant, at the regional level, in the work of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. At the Bangkok conference, Turkmenistan was elected coordinator of the programme to combat desertification, with the participation of various countries in the Asian region. In this connection, Turkmenistan will establish a network of scientific research and training centres in the Asian region and will set up special courses to provide training to desert researchers.

One of the most important chapters of Agenda 21 concerns programme implementation. We believe that the participation of developed donor countries plays an important role in this regard. It includes joint scientific and research activities relating not only to environmental protection but also to environmental improvement, the elaboration of special programmes, training and the transfer of environmentally safe technologies. Those activities are especially important for countries that have huge deposits of raw materials and are intensively developing their industry and transport, as well as for countries that are consumers of raw materials. Assistance by donor countries would contribute to the speedy implementation of such programmes and projects. We support initiatives by countries that offer new technologies, assistance in training personnel and the exchange of experiences.

In our view, the Conference on climate change to be held in Kyoto will give due consideration to those issues, and we hope that it will be successful. It is clearly necessary to elaborate a universal and uniform legislative instrument for environmental protection that will cover responsibility for environmental pollution. What we need are joint scientific studies that will form the basis for establishing programmes of international interest. For example, use of the Caspian Sea should be based primarily on a scientifically substantiated approach, because this Sea is a unique water basin rich in

hydrocarbon resources. It abounds also in fish stocks that should be preserved and multiplied.

Experience has shown more than once that today's environmental problem may turn into tomorrow's environmental disaster. Countries affected by the Aral Sea crisis have repeatedly drawn the attention of the international community to their plight. The negative consequences of this catastrophe are still being felt. They include an adverse impact on people's health and the deterioration of the quality of the soil and the ambient atmosphere. We are grateful to the United Nations Children's Fund, which was the first to respond to this calamity and which developed the Aspera special project for regional and ecological assistance, aimed mainly at helping children and women in the affected areas of the Aral Sea region. A number of United Nations agencies and the World Bank are making efforts to find a solution, but this is not enough fully to resolve the problem. We need a coordinated programme for countering the effects of the Aral Sea crisis in order to improve the environment of the region.

The rapidly deteriorating ecological situation in the world makes it imperative for the planet's inhabitants to take more vigorous action to preserve the environment. The preservation of the planet for future generations is our common goal, and we can be successful in this endeavour only if we act together.

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan for her statement.

*Mrs. Ataeva, Chairman of the delegation of Turkmenistan, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Juli Minoves-Triquell, Chairman of the delegation of Andorra.

*Mr. Juli Minoves-Triquell, Chairman of the delegation of Andorra, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Minoves-Triquell** (Andorra) (*spoke in Catalan; English text furnished by the delegation*): Principle 21 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development proclaims:

> "The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all" *(A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. 1), p. 12)*.

Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 also defines as critical the participation of today's youth in decision-making processes concerning environment and development.

Why did the writers of Agenda 21 identify and highlight the role of youth? Five years after the Conference in Rio de Janeiro, it must be restated: because, by the laws of life, young people are the ones who have hopes for the future, who keep the pulse of humanity going — the vibration of that which grows and is alive.

Youth is, on the whole, an irrepressible force: if we are able to educate it to respect its natural surroundings and other human beings, it will create the basis for the prosperous and harmonious society of the third millennium; but its energy, when channelled into hatred, selfishness and prejudice, can lead us to annihilation.

I therefore advocate today, as my first point, the education of youth: education to know how to respect nature; education also to fight unemployment. Youth unemployment, specially in developing countries, destroys motivation and erodes hope, transforming beings full of promise into emblems of despair. We must therefore increase young people's access to education, in quantity, in nature, and in quality. We must enhance quantity by allocating less money to weapons of war and more to teaching, improving the status of teachers and building schools. We must enhance its nature by educating young people in human rights and in the rights of nature and of our surroundings, the better to develop values such as human and planetary solidarity instead of enmities born of the eternal dramas of history. We must enhance its quality by teaching and improving the learning of professions that could allow men and women, outside of university circles if need be, to feel creative and at the same time to feel a part of creation.

During this session, many Heads of Delegation have spoken of meagre results and of the difficulty of moving forward with all the goals of Rio. By emphasizing the education of young people, we have the key to guarantee that those who come after us will have their soul set upon the defence of what the founding fathers and mothers of Rio described in Agenda 21. Maybe some States have problems totally controlling polluting emissions; maybe other States cannot yet conform to reductions in the production and export of toxic waste to the necessary

extent. But nobody, no Government, has any excuse for not taking action to educate young people and instill in them the morality of the Rio Declaration. Let us now engage in a sustained global effort of education.

The education of young people is the future of Rio. The participation of youth in the decision-making process can become a very important part of Rio's present. It will be possible to apply the conclusions of Agenda 21 only with the participation of all organizations and human actors. Agenda 21 hoped that young people would have access to governmental organizations so that they could make their voices heard in decision-making. Five years later, we must acknowledge that the thermometer of success in this area shows a low temperature.

In conformity with the statement of Prime Minister Marc Forné Molné to the General Assembly last year and with the directives of Minister of Foreign Affairs Albert Pintat, Andorra has sought to work actively on initiatives that favour the inclusion of youth in the decision-making process. At the end of 1996, for example, we were present at the World Youth Forum at Vienna. Andorra is also one of few States that contributes financially to the youth fund of the United Nations. Andorra succeeded also in including in the text of the Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit for Social Development a commitment regarding dialogue between generations geared towards more participation for youth.

Because we come from a small State, Andorrans know well that we cannot alone determine the health of Andorra's nature and ecosystem. We know that we are members of an ecological whole which is interdependent at the regional level and, in the end, at the level of the planet: we know that if rain in the Pyrenees becomes scarce, water will falter in Andorra; that if the Amazon jungle disappears, our fellow citizens will suffer the consequences. We cooperate closely within our immediate region, the Pyrenees mountains, through participation in the Environment Commission of the Pyrenees task force. Also in the context of the Pyrenees, we must highlight the organization by our Ministry of the Environment of the first Andorran environment forum, on the theme "Residual waters in the framework of an integral management of waters in mountain zones", in which a large number of highly regarded scholars participated.

Water is an indispensable resource and will probably be the crux of debate in the twenty-first century. It is one of the constant concerns of the Andorran Ministry of the Environment. In recent years, Andorra, following European directives, has been working on the preparation of a comprehensive plan for water sanitation. The construction of sanitation plants and collectors and the management of Andorra's potable water resources has been one of our Government's priorities.

Much effort by the Andorran Administration has also been focused on the preservation of our mountain forests. To be a mountain country means to have clear duties towards the environment, duties which we have the will to respect. In this sense we salute the Kyrgyz initiative to have the year 2000 declared the international year of mountains, an initiative that we enthusiastically endorse.

The education of young people and participation by young people: these form the basis of Andorra's statement in today's debate, in keeping with the spirit and the letter of Rio. With the optimism, the courage and the energy of youth, we shall build the world of the coming decades; and with our activity we shall give the Earth a deserved rest.

> "Rest, rest, perturbed Earth!
> O rest, thou doleful Mother of Mankind!" (*William Wordsworth, "Invocation to the Earth", 1816*)

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Andorra for his statement.

*Mr. Juli Minoves-Triquell, Chairman of the delegation of Andorra, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Abuzed Omar Dorda, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

*Mr. Abuzed Omar Dorda, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Dorda** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I wish on behalf of my delegation to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this important special session. In the same vein, I pay tribute to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, who has been remarkably active since assuming his post. This augurs well for the United Nations performing its functions in a better manner.

My country is pleased at the increasing interest in the environment shown in recent years by the industrially and scientifically developed countries. We invite the developed countries to move forward and translate their words into deeds. May Almighty God forgive them for the damage they have caused on Earth and in outer space. Although our suffering in developing countries is as old as our existence, it an affliction of a different kind: our suffering stems from backwardness, while the problems they face are the result of progress.

Poverty is no longer an environmental problem for us. It has become a descriptive term, a label. Desertification is no longer an environmental danger, but is a qualifier. In this way, we speak of "sub-Saharan" countries or "desert" countries. Desertification has thus become a name.

Drought is no longer a temporary, seasonal phenomenon, but a continuous state. It has become a hostile element forcing people to seek new places of shelter, which creates yet another problem, that of human migration in the aftermath of the destruction of all animal and plant life.

Marine pollution caused by oil tankers, by the dumping of waste and by wastes from chemical factories, especially in the Mediterranean, along with over-fishing, have all but killed off the remaining marine species, in addition to polluting the beaches with petroleum waste. This has greatly diminished the potential to exploit these resources.

Mines laid in our land when foreigners used it as an arena for their wars have made cultivation impossible. These mines are still a hateful reminder of those times, and continue to kill and maim. Epidemic and endemic diseases resulting from environmental backwardness, such as malaria, bilharzia and other harmful parasite-borne illnesses, are destroying the lives of millions of people in the third world. Ignorance, the root cause of all environmental problems, is still predominant.

That was a brief summary of the most important of the very old environmental problems which are a continuing reality for the developing world, to which we belong. These are the problems of the developing world — not ozone, not carbon dioxide. We welcome cooperation in those areas too, but alongside such cooperation we would rather cooperate on our older major environmental problems.

We need to feel deeply and sincerely for each other's problems and environmental concerns so that we can collectively tackle environmental problems. All parties should contribute according to their abilities and their means. In our country, we have implemented two phases of a multi-phase project which is one of the most important environmental water projects in the world aimed at combatting drought and desertification. I refer to the great man-made river, which, regrettably, has been technologically boycotted by the richest and most advanced country in the world. This project is being implemented in spite of the technological boycott and the funds-transfer embargo imposed on Libya; when it is completed, it will move more than 6 million cubic metres of water daily to the distant desert from the coastal areas through a 5,000-kilometre network of four-metre pipes.

In our view, we should both light a candle and continue to curse the dark. In this respect we call for the following: first, we must intensify research and studies on sea-water desalination with a view to developing the best and most appropriate methods in this field at the least possible cost, for there is no life without water. God Almighty said in the Holy Koran,

> "And Allah has created from water every living creature". (*The Holy Koran, XXIV:45*)

Second, we must intensify research and studies aimed at the development of plant varieties that are more resistant to drought. It should be possible to develop international projects to establish belts of such plants in desert areas in order to restore a small part of the plant cover that has been lost over the last few centuries and to arrest the deterioration of the limited remaining plant cover.

Third, we must develop new irrigation technologies to help save water and to make the optimal use of water. Such technologies and the material needed to implement them should be made available at a reasonable cost.

Fourth, there must be assistance in the production of all types of pumps — deep and surface pumps, suction pumps and pressure pumps — that can operate on solar and wind energy at the least possible cost. This will enable us to benefit from underground water in the desert and other areas.

Fifth, there should be assistance in carrying out geological studies, whether by modern technologies such as satellite remote sensing or by conventional methods,

as part of an international effort to discover underground water sources in areas that need such water. This can be done at the regional level as well, since national studies are usually insufficient.

Sixth, we need enhanced research to develop new crop varieties resistant to higher salinity, if only for the production of certain types of animal fodder. This would make it possible to use highly saline water in agriculture.

Seventh, mines must be cleared, and the relevant maps must be handed over to the countries concerned; these countries must also be given assistance by teams of experts who could help in mine clearance and train local people. All the equipment needed for detecting and clearing mines must also be supplied.

Eighth, there must be an international initiative to eradicate malaria, bilharzia and all other harmful parasites within a specific time-frame; the countries concerned should then be provided with what they need to maintain the cleanliness of their environment in the future.

Ninth, we must create an international climate conducive to sustainable development. This necessitates the following: respect for the sovereignty of States and for their right to live a free and independent life; no political or economic strings should be attached to assistance; there should be no imposition or threat of boycotts or embargoes; the assets of others must not be frozen, and no restrictions must be imposed on their freedom of movement, because this hinders development and sustainability; it is imperative not to commit, threaten or encourage aggression, but instead to have recourse to dialogue and negotiation among States; bilateral, regional, interregional and international cooperation should be encouraged on the basis of equal benefits and equal sacrifices; and there must be no attempt to impose national legislation internationally.

Tenth and last, before it is too late we should address the problems of the cultural environment. This is already being polluted both from the surface of the Earth and from outer space with a view to imposing the culture of the rich and powerful on the deep-rooted cultures of the rest of humanity. This can have very grave consequences. Let us enter into a dialogue about this phenomenon before we are forced to convene a special session of the General Assembly devoted to this important and serious question.

May God guide the steps of the members of this Assembly, and may his peace and blessings be upon them.

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for his statement.

*Mr. Abuzed Omar Dorda, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kim Hyong U, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

*Mr. Kim Hyong U, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Kim Hyong U** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): It is with great attention and high expectations that the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is participating in this special session, which is taking place at a crucial moment when there is a growing need for international cooperation, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, to achieve the common goal of the well-being and prosperity of humankind.

The current session provides an opportunity to review the progress achieved in implementing the commitments of Agenda 21 adopted at the Rio Earth Summit and to explore ways and means to give impetus to the recent process of their implementation. This session is therefore very important in consolidating the common efforts of the international community for sustainable development.

During the five years since the Rio Earth Summit, active national, regional and international efforts have been made to implement Agenda 21 in accordance with the principles set out in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; these have brought about positive results in a number of areas.

Major achievements include the emerging international partnership to achieve sustainable development through joint efforts, and the increased awareness of and support for sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels.

Economic growth, social development and environmental protection are inseparable from sustainable development, whose ultimate goal is to promote the well-

being of mankind through generations. In particular, sustainable development is inconceivable without economic growth.

However, we are well aware that there still exist imbalances and unfair aspects in international economic relations, which will eventually impede sustainable development worldwide. The developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, have been further marginalized from the mainstream of the world economy, and the gap between the developed and developing countries is still widening.

Worse still, the issues regarding poverty alleviation, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, human settlements and external debt have not been dealt with in a proper manner that would promote sustainable development. In particular, financial and technological assistance to the developing countries have continued to decline due to failure on the part of the developed countries to implement sincerely the commitments made under Agenda 21. This has a negative impact upon the efforts of the international community to achieve sustainable development.

The implementation of Agenda 21 represents a global undertaking for the present and the future. Accordingly, it requires a sense of common responsibility on the part of the international community as a whole. It also requires individual Governments to discharge their respective obligations in view of the fact that the level of development, capacity and specific conditions vary from one country or region to another.

In achieving sustainable economic growth and development, it is therefore essential to translate the Rio Declaration and political commitments into action and further enhance international partnership and cooperation on the basis of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

International cooperation should focus first of all on poverty eradication through the transfer of environmentally sound technologies on preferential and concessional terms and the allocation of sufficient resources for sustainable development, thus helping promote economic development in the developing countries. To this end, the current special session should be seized as an opportunity for Member States to recommit themselves to promoting the overall implementation of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 by redoubling their ongoing efforts at the national, regional and international levels.

There is a need for the provision of additional and new financial resources for environment and development. In this context, the fulfilment of commitments by the developed countries to reach the accepted United Nations target of directing 0.7 per cent of gross national product towards official development assistance still remains essential. At the same time, appropriate measures should be taken to curtail the present trends of unbalanced foreign direct investment in order to make it possible for it to serve the sustainable development of the developing countries.

New initiatives and measures to promote the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries should be contemplated in the spirit of pursuing the common prosperity of humankind. On the other hand, the external debt issue should be resolved in a way that will relieve the heavy debt burden of the least developed countries and other developing countries experiencing economic difficulties.

Programmes and funds under the United Nations system, including the Global Environment Facility and other environmental organizations, should rationalize their modes of cooperation and be supported by adequate resources so that they will be able to provide effective cooperation for the implementation of Agenda 21.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has for a long time attached great importance to land management and environmental protection. It has regarded this as being directly linked to the promotion of the people's well-being and the future of the country.

Ever since the Rio Summit meeting, further attention has been given to formulating national development plans that are conducive to the sustainable development of the country, and nationwide efforts are also being made for their implementation.

In particular, having recognized the importance of land management and environmental protection in attaining sustainable development, the Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il, Chairman of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea National Defence Commission and Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, took measures to merge various environmental organs and established the State Environmental Protection Commission under the Administration Council. As a result, environmental protection efforts have been further strengthened,

ensuring the effective use of natural resources and the monitoring of environmental protection throughout the country.

Along with these efforts, the Government enacted relevant laws and regulations on land management and environmental protection and took various measures to ensure their strict observance in all its activities. It is also making every effort to fulfil the obligations and responsibilities it assumed as a State party to world environmental conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea pledges itself once again to make continued efforts to implement the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 and to participate actively in the global efforts to make our life on our planet peaceful, safe and prosperous.

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement.

*Mr. Kim Hyong U, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan.

*Mr. Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Erwa** (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is a pleasure and an honour for me to speak at this important session on behalf of the President of the Republic of the Sudan, Mr. 'Umar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir. I bring you his greetings. He is most concerned with environment and development issues. He participated in the Rio Conference, but pressing circumstances have prevented his presence here.

Allow me to express my country's support for the statements made by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, and by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Chairman of the Group of 77 and China.

Agenda 21 gave hope for millions of people whose optimism was fuelled by the end of the cold war and the promises made by the leaders of industrialized countries that they would provide 0.7 per cent of gross national product as development assistance to developing countries and that they would enter into an international partnership to achieve economic development, sustainable development and the protection of the environment.

Now, five years on from the Rio Conference, those promises are far from being fulfilled because the industrialized countries lack the political will to keep them. Five States have achieved the Rio objective of 0.7 per cent, but overall, industrialized countries have provided 0.25 of their gross national product for development. Industrialized States continue to use the pretext of common responsibility to avoid their principal and direct responsibility for the deterioration of the environment due to harmful consumption patterns and the increase in carbon dioxide emissions and harmful wastes.

Furthermore, those States have not transferred technology to developing countries and have put protectionist obstacles in the way of exports. They impose environmental criteria without, in turn, allowing the exports of developing countries to reach the markets of industrialized countries. We believe that environmental threats go beyond political and geographic borders. We must agree on appropriate formulas for cooperation to reaffirm the right of human beings to a sound environment without harming the sovereignty of States.

We have heard encouraging statements from some leaders of industrialized countries. However, the test will be action and not words. The Rio decisions remain empty slogans. The sad fact is that our developing countries in Africa are forgotten and marginalized. In many cases, official development assistance, which is the backbone of development in Africa, has decreased or been non-existent. The number of people living in poverty in Africa has increased while foreign debt and the servicing of that debt continue to crush our societies and paralyse our economies. The international community merely gives promises to Africa while demanding that it bear the challenges and repercussions of the globalization and privatization of economies and compels African countries to implement corresponding measures without due consideration to their specific circumstances.

The Sudan believes that it is, first and foremost, responsible for its own development. However, like other developing countries, we are not responsible for the

underdevelopment that we have inherited. At the same time, we believe that the international community has the ethical responsibility to correct this injustice. What we are calling for is justice. We are not seeking to put unjustified burdens on others. Therefore, the problem of African debt, a problem which takes 30 per cent of our export revenues, must find a just, durable and non-discriminatory solution. The international community must seriously turn its attention to stemming the tide of poverty and working seriously to eradicate it, in line with the commitment to the right of people to live in dignity, with shelter, food security, education and health. That can only be achieved if industrialized countries fulfil their commitments.

The Sudan, with its million square miles, is the largest country in Africa. The longest stretch of the mighty Nile runs through it. We have a huge underground reserve of water. Therefore, agriculture is the mainstay of our economy. The natural resources of the Sudan make up the broad basis of an integrated environmental fabric, and the State has therefore been increasingly concerned with the environment and its links to development. This, in turn, was reflected in the objectives of the Comprehensive National Strategy for Development for the period 1992-2002.

The Sudan accepted the decisions of Rio on the basis of our belief in the close link between development and the environment. We were among the first States to ratify the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and participated actively in negotiations thereon. We ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, along with the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol.

In the institutional field, the Sudan created a Ministry for the Environment and the Supreme Council for the Environment and National Resources, which has branches in all provinces. In coordination with the Ministry and the various environmental units, the National People's Assembly in the Sudan created a Committee on the Environment and National Resources. In the field of legislation, the Sudan has enacted a comprehensive environmental law to bring Sudanese legislation into line with international conventions and the decisions taken at Rio. Many universities in the Sudan have set up environmental faculties, and environmental studies have become part of high school curricula. Primary school students take part in reforestation and environmental protection efforts as a preparation for the introduction of these subjects into their curricula. In 1995, the Sudan had 305 registered voluntary organizations. Most of them work in the field of environmental awareness and development. Unfortunately, donor circles seem merely to want to finance foreign organizations, and our national organizations have been prevented from effectively participating in that field.

With a view to implementing the Comprehensive National Strategy, the President of the Republic enacted a law ensuring that 17 million acres would be maintained as forests or pastures or for wildlife. A National Commission was created to implement the Montreal Protocol. Since 1992, the Sudan has been implementing projects to develop selected regions through popular participation and the increased participation of women. The Sudan has prepared a national programme to combat desertification and a five-year plan is being prepared to set aside and protect areas threatened with desertification. A long-term national programme is being prepared. We are also implementing a strategic planning project to protect the environment and ensure sustainable development and a capacity-building project in the field of climate change.

All these projects have been implemented with the support of the United Nations Development Programme. The project for the Dinder game reserve and the project for preserving the genetic resources of domestic animals await financing.

Desertification has led to a deterioration of the vegetation cover, which has affected agriculture, pastures and wildlife and has led to soil erosion in the countryside. The latest studies show that 37 per cent of the Sudan is threatened by this phenomenon. This in turn has led to the exodus of peoples from those areas to the cities, with the ensuing sanitation and housing crises.

The fight against poverty is a bulwark of sustainable development and the Sudan has therefore begun to implement integrated programmes to eradicate poverty, including charitable and solidarity funds and productive family projects. The project for developing renewable sources of energy is an effort to protect the forest cover.

The Sudan has effectively cooperated at the regional level, participating in all the environmental protection bodies created by the Arab League and the Organization of African Unity. Our participation in the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development helped to create an effective organization in this field. The Sudan has put forward a project for

developing the Red Sea environment within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Unfortunately, appropriate funding has not been found.

The Sudan believes that peace is the means to achieve sustainable development domestically. We believe in a just and lasting solution to the problem in southern Sudan in accordance with the principles of the Charter, Rio Principle 27 and article 20 of the World Charter for Nature. We are convinced that military activity harms the environment and hampers development and stability and have therefore sought to achieve peace with the factions fighting in the south of the country.

A Political Charter was signed in 1996 and was then expanded into the Khartoum Convention on peace, which was signed by eight of the rebel factions in April 1997. The Convention grants the people of the southern Sudan all their demands for self-determination and the sharing of power and wealth within the framework of the principle of citizenship equal in rights and obligations. The State is now preparing projects for rehabilitating, rebuilding and developing the south of the country. The United Nations Development Programme has agreed to finance projects in selected areas of the south for development.

From this rostrum, I appeal to those brothers who continue to bear arms to join the peace treaty, which is open to all. It is not directed against anyone, because hopes can be fulfilled only through peace and negotiation, not through weapons, which only further destroy the environment and hamper development.

In conclusion, we believe that the environment is a gift of God to the whole of humanity. Threatening the environment will harm all, rich and poor alike, whatever geographic borders separate them. Let us stand shoulder to shoulder to obtain a better future for all our children.

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan for his statement.

*Mr. Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, Chairman of the delegation of the Sudan, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** May I make two requests? First, may we all cooperate and keep to our seven-minute limit? Secondly, there is too much noise in the Hall. This is a General Assembly meeting. Please respect the decorum of the house.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Eldar Kouliev, Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan.

*Mr. Eldar Kouliev, Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Kouliev** (Azerbaijan) (*interpretation from Russian*): The convening of a special session of the General Assembly at such a high level is convincing proof of the outstanding role played by the Rio Summit in the theoretical analysis of global trends of world development on the eve of the next millennium.

For Azerbaijan, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was doubly significant, since it was the first global forum under United Nations auspices attended by the representatives of my country after the restoration of the independence and sovereignty of the Azerbaijan Republic in late 1991. I need not mention the enthusiasm with which we received the decisions of the Rio Summit, the quintessence of which was Agenda 21, unanimously adopted by the international community.

Our firm adherence to the concept of sustainable development has not been abstract in nature, but is dictated by the harsh realities faced by Azerbaijan in the late twentieth century. Decades of destructive and unlimited exploitation of the rich natural — mostly mineral — resources of my country brought the unique ecosystem of Azerbaijan to the brink of catastrophe. The one-sided economic structure imposed on Azerbaijan in the last decades of the nineteenth century, at the dawn of the first "oil boom" — subsequently supported and consolidated by the totalitarian, centrally planned Soviet economy — resulted in the stunning fact that, by 1997, almost 4 million tons of extremely toxic waste containing heavy metals had been accumulated on the territory of a relatively small country of 86,000 square kilometres and a population of 7.5 million.

A serious danger threatens the Caspian Sea, whose unique bio-resources — first and foremost its valuable stocks of sturgeon — are on the verge of vanishing. The concentration of heavy metals in the shallow Caspian seabed exceeds the average level by more than 100 times. In the late 1980s, more than 15,000 tons of oil and oil products, 20,000 tons of mineral acids, 800 tons of dissolved iron and 500 tons of phenols were discharged annually into the Caspian basin.

Air pollution has reached a critical level. In 1988, the discharge of hazardous substances into the air was almost 2.5 million tons, of which 93,000 tons of sulphur dioxide, 638,000 tons of carbon oxide, 82,000 tons of nitrogen oxide, 1,665,000 tons of hydrocarbons and 37,000 tons of volatile organic substances.

The process of soil degradation in Azerbaijan is also continuing at a frightening pace. At the beginning of this decade, about 30 per cent of the total land resources of Azerbaijan were affected by water and wind erosion. The total area of salinized lands reached 1.5 million hectares.

It seemed that the scale and degree of the environmental problems which Azerbaijan faced might serve as an ideal test for the implementation of the principle declared in Agenda 21, according to which sustainable development can be achieved only through coordinated efforts at the national, regional and international levels. Let us take as an example the problem of preserving the Caspian fish stocks. It is true, Azerbaijan is only one of five countries catching sturgeon in the Caspian Sea and, in the absence of coordinated international policies and programmes on fish-stocks preservation, the unilateral actions of one State alone, however important it may be, cannot guarantee the desired effect.

The same goes for the problem of the transboundary transportation of toxic waters. At the end of the last decade, more than 12 billion cubic metres of contaminated sewage was discharged annually into the Caspian Sea, of which 95 per cent came from the Volga river and 500 million cubic metres were transported to Azerbaijan via the transit rivers Kura and Araks from neighbouring countries.

Unfortunately, the realities faced by Azerbaijan as it reestablished its statehood put paid to many of our illusions and hopes.

The armed aggression methodically waged by the Republic of Armenia against my country from 1991 to 1994 resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, the loss of almost 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan and the appearance in the country of more than 1 million refugees and displaced persons.

Combined with the natural difficulties inherent in the transitional period — difficulties experienced also by the other countries that are in the process of transforming their centrally planned economies into market economies — the consequences of Armenia's aggression constitute the main obstacle to a thoroughgoing improvement of the ecological situation in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, despite the enormous difficulties that our Republic is facing, the five years that have elapsed since we regained our independence were not wasted from the standpoint of improving our country's environment.

We are gradually establishing a legal basis for environmental protection. In this connection, we note first and foremost the adoption in 1992 of a law on environmental protection and the use of natural resources, as well as the fact that we have devised an ecological framework for our country and set priorities for State policy in this area. These include protection of the biosphere, the sustainable use of natural resources, the reduction and disposal of waste, the rational use of energy, and the reduction of risks posed by human activities. The implementation of this strategy is to be backed up by a national plan of action for the environment, currently under preparation by specialists from my country with the support of the World Bank.

Twelve laws are also being elaborated that will regulate various aspects of the rational use of natural resources in Azerbaijan. We have also acceded to a number of international legal instruments that form the basis for international cooperation in the area of environmental protection, *inter alia,* the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

A number of bilateral and multilateral agreements have been concluded on cooperation in the area of the environment, including an agreement on cooperation and ecological protection between Azerbaijan and Turkey; a protocol on cooperation between the Ministry for the Environment of the United Kingdom and the State Committee for the Environment of the Republic of Azerbaijan; and a cooperation agreement between British Petroleum and the State Committee for the Environment in the area of ecology.

We are steadily developing international cooperation on the Caspian Sea. In 1991, the first international conference on the problems of the Caspian Sea was held in Baku; representatives of 158 countries participated. November 1993 saw the holding, also in Baku, of an international ecological exhibition, "Eco-Khazar 93".

An international coordinating council on cooperation to resolve the problems of the Caspian Sea has been set up and is functioning smoothly. Its work is actively being supported by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank. A joint expert group working within the framework of the Caspian Initiative, after studying the ecological situation in the Caspian littoral States, prepared a draft programme for regional cooperation, which was endorsed in Tehran in 1994.

The Government of my country hopes that the successfully developing international cooperation in the area of the environment will start bearing fruit in the near future, not only in the areas that I referred to but also in resolving other urgent problems that face our Republic, in particular improving the supply of drinking water for our population. In this respect, a project for Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, has been worked out and is being successfully implemented with assistance from the World Bank.

The twentieth century started for Azerbaijan on an optimistic note. The first "oil boom" gave rise to great hopes for harmonious — or, as we say nowadays, sustainable — development, in which industrial progress does not destroy nature but, on the contrary, gives rise to the material conditions for improving the environment.

Today, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, our mood is optimistic. And again, our optimism is largely due to the promising development represented by the huge oil deposits of the Caspian Sea. Nature is more patient and wiser than man. Once again it has given us a chance to make use of its riches, but this time we must be careful. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past.

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan for his statement.

*Mr. Eldar Kouliev, Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan.

*Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Alimov** (Tajikistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): In the five years since the Rio de Janeiro Conference, obvious changes have taken place in the substance and the dynamics of the phenomenon of development. These changes are characterized by accelerated globalization, stronger tendencies towards regional integration and uneven progress indicators in individual regions. For some States, these were years of successful economic growth and improved social conditions. For others, they were years of trial, especially for those countries not at peace, which could not make progress towards sustainable development and which therefore could not fully implement the recommendations of Agenda 21.

In the Republic of Tajikistan, because of the civil conflict that swept the country, important tasks such as integrating social and environment conservation goals with economic plans and programmes and the introduction of new approaches to securing ecologically sound development have receded into the background. As members know, in recent years efforts by the President and the Government of the country have mainly been devoted to restoring peace and tranquillity and creating conditions for engaging the people in economic activities.

In the context of the considerable progress achieved towards the peaceful settlement of the inter-Tajik conflict, with the support of the United Nations, the observer States and their mediation, it is expected that tomorrow, on 27 June 1997, the General Agreement on Peace and National Accord will be signed in Moscow, and that the efforts of the country's authorities will then enter a new, vigorous and constructive phase. Of course, the Government of Tajikistan bears the main responsibility for establishing peaceful living conditions and normalcy in the country and for adopting efficient measures to accelerate the revival of the country's economy in the post-conflict period.

We understand that the support of the international community in this transitional period will to a great extent depend on how quickly difficulties can be overcome as we move from civil confrontation to the building of a normal, peaceful society. The Government of Tajikistan is resolved to carry out this difficult, multifaceted task at minimum cost.

Obviously, in the short term humanitarian assistance will still have to be provided to those residents of the country who have suffered as the result of the military conflict, in order to ease the severity of the crisis and to reduce human suffering at this difficult stage.

But the most important thing now is that the prospect of peace makes it possible for my Government to focus on tackling unresolved problems with redoubled energy. This means, first of all, the accelerated rebuilding of our devastated social and economic infrastructure; the return of people to their homes and their social and psychological adjustment to their new living conditions; and the active involvement of our citizens in economic activities — in a word, the creation of favourable conditions for the democratic development of Tajik society.

From this standpoint, we believe that the recommendations expected of this session will be important, as they will emphasize the interaction of peace, security and sustainable development.

From the practical standpoint, Tajikistan hopes that future efforts to implement the decisions of the Rio Conference will give priority attention to such issues as ensuring sustainable energy, transportation, agriculture and drinking water supplies.

Our country's geographical location makes it important for us to continue our efforts at the early identification of possible environmental disasters, and at the speedy elimination of their effects. In this connection, we should make resolute efforts to heighten our readiness to respond to environmental emergencies with life-saving and rehabilitation efforts and by strengthening relevant global and regional tools and strategies.

Ninety-three per cent of the territory of the Republic of Tajikistan consists of mountains. As a mountainous country with specific and unique environmental and climatic conditions, Tajikistan considers it especially urgent to give greater attention to the preservation of biological diversity and natural mountain ecosystems. In this connection we support the proposal of the Kyrgyz Republic to proclaim the year 2000 as the international year of mountains. We believe that the formulation of a comprehensive plan of action within the framework of such a year would enhance our common efforts to ensure the sustainable development of mountainous regions.

Today, Tajikistan is vigorously working to make the transition to a socially oriented market economy. The economic reforms undertaken by the Government against the background of the ongoing peace process promise improved living conditions for our people. However, reality requires a frank view of the state of affairs: without favourable external conditions we will not be able to deal in the short term with either rehabilitation or reconstruction. First and foremost, we need the donor community to continue its noble efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups of the population, along with external support for our economic reforms. We need an inflow of investment into Tajikistan, more active involvement by our export sectors in international trade, and gradual integration into international financial and commercial systems.

In spite of all the difficulties that have beset my country, we are prepared, in cooperation with other States, to advance within the guidelines laid down in Agenda 21, to strive for tangible results in our environmental protection efforts, and to achieve social justice and economic growth.

All these elements of the concept of sustainable development are of equal importance to us, and they are indivisible.

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan for his statement.

*Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I give the floor now to His Excellency Mr. Naste Čalovski, Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

*Mr. Naste Čalovski, Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Čalovski** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Let me begin my statement, Sir, by expressing my delegation's great satisfaction at seeing you, the eminent representative of friendly Malaysia, presiding over the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to sustainable development.

The Republic of Macedonia is a beautiful country on the Balkan peninsula. We have many beautiful lakes and rivers, many forests, beautiful mountains and valleys, a mild Mediterranean climate and a healthy and educated population. We have no doubt therefore that we should do everything necessary to avoid endangering this blessing, for we have no right to endanger it. Our obligation is to see to it that our development is sustainable and that our environment remains protected from pollution and other dangers. To put it simply, this

is because Macedonia does not belong to the present generation only; it belongs also to our future generations.

In the opinion of my delegation, the priority aim of the present special session is to reaffirm the commitments made at Rio in Agenda 21, and to make solemn commitments that they will be implemented in the years to come. Is the special session prepared to act so that this aim will be achieved? Our answer is "Yes". Not doing this would be a big step backward with unforeseeable difficulties for the development of international cooperation. Preparations for this session were thorough on the national and the international levels, in the United Nations in particular, so we hope that the session will succeed. If we truly adhere to the concept of sustainable development and to the idea that we live in an interdependent world, on one planet, if we are truly ready to act, if we have the political will to act, the result of our deliberations will be positive.

What are we doing in the Republic of Macedonia and internationally to implement the Rio commitments of Agenda 21? The Republic of Macedonia is a European country with a market economy in transition. That position requires the adoption of basic and specific policies in all fields of development. As a follow-up to the Agenda 21 commitments and to other international commitments such as the European ecological action plan, and aiming to attain high European and world standards, my Government has adopted a national environmental action plan, copies of which we can make available to interested delegations. It is an important achievement and a proper tool to credibly follow a sustainable policy, to protect our environment and keep it healthy and to keep our country's natural habitat beautiful. The action plan will be successful if our economy grows, if we have success in trade, if we have foreign investment in our country: in short, if development in our country goes on continuously, acquires all elements of a continuous process, and is sustainable.

Our national environmental action plan sets out in a very specific manner what should be done to improve air and water quality and to improve solid waste management, biodiversity conservation, the renewal and preservation of our forests, and so on.

Of course, the realization of these purposes depends in the first place on us, but international cooperation is also necessary, and in some areas is essential. For example, in order to secure additional investment in the field of ecology, the debt-for-ecology swap methodology is of the utmost importance: cancellation of part of a country's external debt in exchange for increased environmental protection, along with other elements.

The future development of the Republic of Macedonia very much depends on the situation in our neighbourhood and on the manner and speed with which European integration proceeds. The globalization of the world economy and of international trade will be welcome if it avoids the marginalization of the smaller and weaker economies. The liberalization of world trade and the improvement of market access are essential if economies are to develop. It is essential that the present trend in development assistance be reversed to reach 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance. This is of particular importance to many developing countries, especially to least developed countries and to landlocked and small island States.

All sectors of the population should be involved in this effort. Civil society should be encouraged to have an even more active profile. It is essential that the global and regional sharing of information be improved. We should be aware not only of the global environmental problems but also of the success stories.

The need to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases is everybody's concern. The forthcoming conference at Kyoto will be a very important event in this respect.

To achieve progress on all these points, international cooperation is a must. As far as my country is concerned — and, I think, also for the other countries of our region — the essential thing is that the Balkan countries become part of European integration as soon as possible. The best investment in the Balkans from the political, economic and social standpoints would be "Europization", not "Balkanization".

Every effort should be made to ensure that this session ends successfully. My delegation is working in that direction. In future, the most important thing will be the implementation of the Rio commitments, of Agenda 21 and of the commitments that will be agreed upon at the present session. This will significantly help the realization of the call by the General Assembly that by the year 2000 the Balkans should become a stable zone of cooperation and development.

I shall be supplying the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General with copies of my country's national environmental action plan.

**The President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for his statement.

*Mr. Naste Čalovski, Chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The next speaker is Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

*Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Diouf** (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) (*interpretation from French*): The Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro gave a strong impetus to thought and action on ensuring sustainable development and environmental conservation. An irreversible change in outlook was indeed needed in the light of the major challenges of the twenty-first century: improving the well-being of a growing population, notably by eliminating hunger and poverty, and safeguarding the resources of our planet for the survival of future generations.

To face these challenges, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) restructured itself and formed a Sustainable Development Department, thus ensuring that a future-oriented perspective would be an integral part of the policies and projects of the sectoral departments of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and economic and social affairs. FAO embarked on an ambitious programme of decentralization that would bring its experts closer to the realities on the ground and to the needs of rural communities.

As task manager for four chapters of Agenda 21, the organization, in collaboration with its partners, has refocused its policies, programmes and projects with member States. The idea of sustainable agricultural and rural development has been conceptualized and defined through dialogue with partners. A new, integrated approach to land-use management and land protection has been developed and is gradually being put into effect. National forestry action programmes have been developed and implemented in many countries. Finally, a special effort has been made with respect to the management of mountain areas.

In addition to its specific responsibilities for these four chapters of Agenda 21, FAO also is also playing a key role in a number of other areas. The first is the definition and implementation of rational policies for the utilization of water resources. Water is a very precious resource that will become increasingly scarce. In this connection, it should be noted that agriculture is by far the largest consumer of water, accounting for 75 per cent of total offtake, while irrigated agriculture provides 40 per cent of the world's food production.

The second area is the drafting and adoption of a code of conduct for responsible fisheries. Third, we are working on the renewable energy needed for agricultural production and processing. Fourth, we are cooperating with our partners under the Climate Agenda and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Fifth, we give active support to the Convention on Biological Diversity and are working with the Convention secretariat to develop a joint programme on agricultural biodiversity. Sixth, we support the Convention to Combat Desertification, whose first conference of parties will take place in Rome in early October at the joint invitation of the Italian Government and of FAO.

The Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the Plan of Action adopted by the World Food Summit were natural extensions of the Rio Summit. The Heads of State or Government and other high-level representatives of 186 countries, meeting at Rome in November 1996, pledged to eliminate hunger and malnutrition, *inter alia* by providing a stable political environment based on respect for all human rights, by ensuring equality of opportunity for all, particularly for women, and by adopting social and economic policies that would encourage public and private initiative while at the same time safeguarding the environment. More specifically, they undertook to involve the people and grass-roots organizations more closely in the framing and implementation of specific plans and programmes for the sustainable management of natural resources: water, soil, plant and animal material, oceans, forests and climate.

FAO is convinced that the food requirements of the world's population as a whole can be met for decades to come in the framework of a system of sustainable development. In order to achieve that goal, appropriate measures must be taken here and now to build national

economic environments conducive to investment in the primary sector and acts of international solidarity must give the most disadvantaged rural populations control over water resources and access to effective technologies, modern inputs, credit and markets.

The resounding message from Rome is that sustainability and food security are inseparable and that agriculture and the rural world must feature in any debate on sustainable development. In this context, the early implementation of international agreements, such as the Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Leipzig Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources and the three Conventions directly emanating from Rio are of great urgency. Moreover, the implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests — notably through the FAO-led Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests — constitute a fundamental stage towards the consolidation of a collective approach to natural resource management.

FAO remains convinced of the value of the commitments made in Rio five years ago. The full implementation of the decisions taken at the Earth Summit and at the World Food Summit will lead us to a better world and a healthier life, with the environment safeguarded and peace and justice on our planet.

**The President**: I thank the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for his statement.

*Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President**: The next speaker on the list is Mr. Fawzi Al-Sultan, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

*Mr. Fawzi Al-Sultan, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Al-Sultan** (International Fund for Agricultural Development): At the Earth Summit in Rio five years ago, the international community reached a new consensus on the imperative of meeting the needs of present generations while safeguarding the interests of future ones. Since Rio, three important international Conventions on environmental issues have entered into force, and several sectoral programmes have been agreed. Many countries have elaborated national programmes based on Agenda 21, while multilateral institutions have sought to bring environmental sustainability to the centre of their operations.

Yet if one poses the question of whether poor people and fragile environments are better off today, the honest response would have to be one of some disappointment. Indeed, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) has underlined that the global environment has continued to deteriorate. Of course, the amount of additional resources mobilized since Rio has been small compared to the numbers invoked there. This is certainly one factor underlying these disappointing trends.

There are, however other, elements. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was among those that argued forcefully at Rio that poverty alleviation must be the principal cross-cutting theme of Agenda 21. In this connection, I am glad to note that the CSD has recently reiterated that the eradication of poverty is one of the fundamental goals of the international community.

Nonetheless, there is still a tendency to give attention to individual and sectoral environmental issues, rather than to look at sustainable development in a broader, more integrated and people-centred sense. Specific environmental concerns are often more in the nature of symptoms. As important as it is to deal with them, the goal of the Earth Summit was to address the underlying causes often rooted in poverty and the unsustainable pattern of resource use.

The rural poor are often seen as culprits contributing to environmental degradation. They are in reality the victims. In degraded areas small farmers, herders and forest dwellers often have little alternative but to overuse or misuse land and water and to cut down trees for fuel in their struggle for survival. The resulting degradation worsens their poverty, giving a further twist to the downward spiral. This vicious cycle must he broken so that the rural poor can act in defence of the natural resource base on which their livelihoods depend.

The key to doing this is to promote what we call an enabling micro-level environment. Major elements of such an environment are a demand-driven extension system that offers to poor farmers viable conservation-oriented technologies, together with a rural financial system that would give them access to credit, financial inputs and small investments. The availability of fair,

nearby markets and at least a minimal infrastructure in the form of roads and communications are essential.

With more than 470 poverty projects in the rural areas of 112 countries over its two decades of operations, IFAD has acquired extensive experience in supporting interventions to foster such a micro-environment. They have shown promise in breaking and even reversing the negative links between poverty and environmental degradation. An IFAD project in the Niger shows how relatively modest community-led interventions, based on local knowledge and action, can make a big difference. The project there has helped to test, upgrade and make widely available traditional soil and water conservation techniques such as "demi-lunes" to collect water and traditional planting pits known as "tassas". As a result, crop yields have improved significantly, both under normal and deficient rainfall conditions. These simple, cheap and easily replicable techniques have been widely adopted, even outside the project zone. Large areas of previously eroded and barren land are being brought back into productive use.

One of the outcomes of the Earth Summit, the Convention to Combat Desertification, does in fact respond to these broader concerns. Moreover, for the first time in environmental law, the rural poor and their communities are cast as the central part of the solution rather than being seen only as the problem. If properly implemented in its true spirit, the Convention is likely to be one that will directly help improve the lives of millions of poor and food-insecure peoples living in semi-arid and dry-land zones.

In view of the potential of the Convention to Combat Desertification, IFAD is supporting countries in the early stages of its implementation by helping prepare national programmes and by financing investment projects to build a supportive environment at the local level. These activities are based on our experience of interventions such as that in the Niger, with the aim of creating conditions which allow poor farmers working within their own organizations — particularly women — to protect the local environment while raising their output and incomes. Indeed, since the adoption of the Convention in 1994, IFAD has provided some $600 million in financing for projects and programmes in dry-land areas at risk from degradation and desertification.

Affected countries can do much to help themselves, not least through institutional and policy reform. But they cannot do it all alone. The Convention to Combat Desertification recognizes the importance of external resources to supplement domestic funding for effective national and local action. This is reflected in the establishment of a global mechanism to service parties to the Convention. The most important role for the global mechanism is to promote the mobilization and channelling of financing.

IFAD, on invitation, has submitted a proposal to host the global mechanism of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention. Our proposal envisages a global mechanism that would act in partnership with other concerned institutions to help improve the effectiveness of existing resource flows and catalyse new flows and sources of finance. It would also give particular attention to strengthening domestic resource mobilization and private sector involvement, as well as promoting a more effective blending of concessional resources and non-concessional external resources. The Convention to Combat Desertification has created enormous potential to help millions of poor farmers to reduce their vulnerability and food insecurity. IFAD intends to be at the forefront of the efforts to realize this potential fully.

The impact of Rio will not be measured by how many agreements are concluded between Governments. Indeed, its promise will start to be fulfilled only when real progress is made to reverse the degradation of marginal lands, forests, streams and coastal areas which provide homes to a large proportion of humanity. We at IFAD, with a mandate to focus on the rural poor, look forward to playing a full part in this noble and crucial enterprise on whose success depends our common future.

**The President:** I thank the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development for his statement.

*Mr. Fawzi Al-Sultan, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The next speaker on the list is Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association, speaking on behalf of the Farmers' Major Group.

*Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Ms. O'Brien** (World Sustainable Agriculture Association): I am Denise O'Brien, a small sustainable farmer from the state of Iowa in the United States of America. Today, I speak to you as a mother and a farmer, for all the world's farmers, and not as a representative of the United States Government.

Until two years ago, my husband and I ran a medium-sized farm, milking 40 dairy cows and raising crops on approximately 80 hectares. Due to the debt crisis of United States farmers in the 1980s and the intensive industrialization of agriculture, we gave up farming as our only source of income. My husband now works full time away from the farm. We, like other farmers in the world, will spend a great percentage of our income over the next years on paying back the debt.

I now farm by myself full time. My crops are strawberries, raspberries, apples and asparagus, and I raise chickens and turkeys. These are for local consumption, and I try to maintain a strict regime of organic practices. My children, more than likely, will not farm. This age of industrialized agriculture presents few opportunities for someone to enter agriculture.

This story is not mine alone. It is a story repeated every hour of every day as more and more people leave the rural areas and leave farming. This is a worldwide phenomenon. The basis for food production on small- and medium-sized farms is eroding, as is the rural society that food producers have sustained.

It is under these auspices that I have been given the awesome task of speaking for farmers of the world. In my 21 years of farming, I have always fought the political battle of small- and medium-sized producers. During that time, I have had small farmers from around the world visit my farm, and I have visited small- and medium-sized producers in other countries. I do not pretend that I can speak on all the issues of farmers, but I do know that there are a number of common features that we all share.

We shared our experiences when we met at the Earth Summit and wrote the NGO Sustainable Agriculture Treaty, which states that it is an urgent necessity to:

> "Break with the dominant predatory model of agriculture in favour of new patterns of sustainability which are equitable and participatory, to guarantee the full control of the means of production and natural resources in the hands of the people who work the land, insuring them a permanent source of income and high levels of productivity" (*NGO Sustainable Agriculture Treaty, para. 10*).

We defined sustainable agriculture as:

> "a model of social and economic organization based on an equitable and participatory vision of development which recognizes the environment and natural resources as the foundation of economic activity. Agriculture is sustainable when it is ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate and based on a holistic scientific approach" (*ibid., para. 11*).

As a woman farmer, I shared experiences with others when we met in Rome prior to the World Food Summit in 1996. Women wrote a statement there that declared there needed to be;

> "democratization of the access to resources especially land, water, seeds, and intellectual property; the promotion of sustainable agriculture and common-based resource management; the establishment of local, people-based trade systems and the infrastructure thereof; the empowerment of women through equal representation in decision-making bodies at local, regional, national and global levels; access to education for women in general and girl children in particular; access to credit and other financial support for women; rurally appropriate education, health, recreation, childcare and other infrastructural support systems designed by and for rural communities with consideration to both genders; concession of the right of indigenous peoples to their ancestral land".

We also shared experiences when La Via Campesina, a growing international movement of farmers, peasants, farm workers and indigenous peoples, met in April 1996 in Mexico and declared that:

> "Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right."

The industrial model of agriculture has caused social, economic and environmental devastation in our rural areas. Many farmers are questioning the

sustainability of such a model. As a result, farmers are moving to more ecological production methods. There are governments that are supporting farmers in this transition. For example, organic transition payment initiatives, developed in the late 1980s in Denmark, Sweden and Germany, have been extended to farmers in 15 European countries under the common legal framework of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2078/92. There is also an example of government involvement in China's Green Food Programme. This is a semi-government organization and is a member of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. The Programme limits the use of pesticides and increases the use of farm manures. One more example comes from my own country, the United States. This programme is called Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education and provides the opportunity for farmers to learn how to adopt sustainable practices.

Producing food entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially water, land and seed. Farmers who work the land must have the right to practise the sustainable management of natural resources and to preserve biological diversity. Genetic resources are the result of millennia of evolution and belong to all of humanity. Farming communities must have the right freely to use and protect the diverse genetic resources, including seeds, which have been developed by them throughout history.

We must understand, though, that all these efforts on the part of farmers, Governments and the private sector will be in vain as long as transnational corporations resist the use of sustainable development principles in their operations. None of us is going to witness or participate in a sustainable world as long as transnationals are not held accountable for their unsustainable use of the world's resources. As His Excellency President Mugabe of the Republic of Zimbabwe said in his speech at the first meeting of this session, on 23 June:

> "The World Trade Organization has assisted transnational corporations with global economic opportunities but has not inculcated in them responsibilities for the environment, as we are witnessing cut-throat competition and corporate avarice undermining the whole process of sustainable development."

I am not an economist. I am not a scientist or a researcher, but along with over 450 million farmers, I have what many of you need — a close relationship with our planet Earth. I urge all people to become involved with farmers in food production for local consumption. I urge all people to take the time to evaluate their lives in terms of the impact they have on the very nature of a healthy, livable planet. In order for all of us to survive on this finite planet, we must take into consideration every thing we do every day of our lives. We can only survive if we give back what we have taken.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association for her statement.

*Ms. Denise O'Brien of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The next speaker on the list is Mr. Sheku Syl Kamara of Peace Child International, speaking on behalf of the Children and Youth Major Group.

*Mr. Sheku Syl Kamara of Peace Child International was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Kamara** (Peace Child International): I stand before you here today as the sole representative of that half of the world's population which is under 25. I also represent a country, Sierra Leone, whose infrastructure has collapsed as a result of a military takeover of the democratically elected Government. My country has ground to a standstill. I came here via a dangerous car journey, a long walk across the border into Guinea and three nights sleeping on a pavement, waiting for my United States visa. However, I am thrilled and honoured to be here and want to thank the Government of Norway for supporting my travel and also the people of the United Nations Development Programme, Julian and Rosey at Peace Child International, and Ann Clifford and Seth Winnick at the United States Mission to the United Nations, who worked so hard to enable me to be here.

Since Rio, my country has been ravaged by civil war and increasing poverty, with their attendant problems of poor sanitation, gender inequality, lack of human rights and environmental degradation. What can young people do about this? The 100 young members of my group, the Sierra Leone chapter of Peace Child International, tried to organize a peace conference to bring together youth and political leaders to see where the problems lay. That conference did not happen — we could not raise the funds. You may ask: Would it have helped? Perhaps not, but it could have made young

people aware of the issues and given them hope for a better future. That alone is worth it.

So I ask you, representatives: In future, please give financial support to initiatives by young people.

You promised to do so at the Earth Summit: Agenda 21, Chapter 25, paragraph 9 (g), promises to give support to programmes, projects and networks that encourage young people. Some initiatives you have supported, and my organization is extremely grateful to the Governments of Finland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Denmark and Sweden, which have supported the Peace Child Rescue Mission programme.

Young people need to learn the principles of sustainable development. We are anxious that education for this noble concept not remain a forgotten priority for the next five years.

We have found in Sierra Leone that, doing the Rescue Mission sustainability indicators in our communities, we learn very well the meaning of the concept. But I come here today to issue an ultimatum to Governments: Particularly in Africa, you have to do more to educate us in this concept. You are failing us. If we are going to learn how to sustain life on this planet, you have to make education on sustainability a central concept of school curricula. Young people of Rescue Mission and other groups want to do this, which is why we have created our own children's version of Agenda 21 and the Indicators Pack. But we can do little without your support.

So please, representatives: Support youth initiatives in education for sustainable development.

Young people can do so much to teach each other. Through the Rescue Mission network, I hear of girls aged 14 and 15 who are running primary schools alone in remote parts of Pakistan. In my country and throughout the world, young people are planting trees, seeding embankments to prevent erosion, carrying out programmes to protect coral reefs. We can do much, much more if you look to us as partners in this great global partnership for sustainable development.

But you, the Governments, must support us and take the lead. In this, the Governments of the third world, particularly in Africa, have an appalling record. You signed that document at Rio committing yourselves to partnership. You have not delivered. How many developing countries whose delegations sit here today include youth in their delegations? How many have consulted youth on the policy proposals they have been preparing over the last few weeks. Not many — perhaps none.

For the empowerment of today's youth, Peace Child Sierra Leone has launched a major initiative around the Day of the African Child to bring together youth with decision-makers. Young people will work all the hours God gives to sustain and improve life for future generations, but we need your help. We need the transfer of technology from the North to the South, which is very important to sustainable development.

I have heard this week Government after Government commit itself to the eradication of poverty. You said the same at Rio and at Copenhagen. Yet, in my country, poverty gets worse, not better. Life is short: most of my generation will be dead before we reach the age of most of you in this room. That is the result of poverty, my friends, and it is why most young people in countries like mine dream of getting away from the Godforsaken place where we were born to seek a better future and a longer life in Europe or North America. That is the opposite of sustainable development.

I believe that, if the idea of sustainable development is made the primary concern of every Government, much will be done to alleviate the problems. That is my main message to you: Get sustainable development at the heart of your Government policies, not somewhere on the fringes. You must support youth initiatives that will make young people like myself want to stay in our countries and generate homegrown prosperity.

Rescue Mission and I have developed a project called Sustainable Development Training Centres — Internet cafes where young people and others can learn about information technology and sustainable development in the same place, while at the same time providing efficient business services at a profit. The project won the support of the United Nations system-wide World Youth Forum held in Vienna. It is also my hope that the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the European Union will act upon the principles established in Rio and provide the funding to set up these Training Centres.

It may seem ridiculous to try to set up such a thing in Sierra Leone right now, but the idea of this project gives me hope. I know that it can happen and give

support to thousands of other young people like me, so I trust you will support the projects. I trust that they will be successful and that, as a result, there will be a storm of youth initiatives for sustainable, ecologically friendly enterprises which can bring both financial and environmental security to young people in countries like mine.

I repeat: Please, representatives, support youth initiatives for sustainable enterprises.

Give us hope in a benighted world where we seem to be sleepwalking into the twenty-first century, without a map or a candle. Most young people grow up in fear of crime, mass unemployment and total disillusionment about a world wedded to short-term interests and careless of the long-term needs of future generations like ours.

Thousands of young people die every day from curable diseases while $3 million a minute is spent on arming ourselves against each other. We do not seem able to find the $17 billion needed to create a population stabilization programme that would ensure that humanity does not, like a plague of locusts, destroy the planet which gives us all life. The future must rise to the top of our agendas if it is to exist at all.

Education, funding, partnership — those are the three priorities identified by youth at the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. I repeat them to the Assembly today and beg, plead and cajole members most fervently to support our youth initiatives, which will give us real responsibility and a stake in implementing that future of which Agenda 21 gave us such a bold and tantalizing glimpse.

**The President:** I thank the representative of Peace Child International for his statement.

*Mr. Sheku Syl Kamara of Peace Child International was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America.

*Mr. William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**President Clinton**: Five years ago in Rio, the nations of the world joined together around a simple but revolutionary proposition: that today's progress must not come at tomorrow's expense.

In our era, the environment has moved to the top of the international agenda because how well a nation honours it will have an impact, for good or ill, not only on the people of that nation but all across the globe. Preserving the resources we share is crucial not only for the quality of our individual environments and health but also to maintain stability and peace, within nations and among them. As the father of conservation in our nation, John Muir, said,

> "When we try to pick anything out by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe".

In the years since Rio there has been real progress in some areas. Nations have banned the dumping of radioactive wastes in the oceans and reduced marine pollution from sources on land. We are working to protect the precious coral reefs, to conserve threatened fish and to stop the advance of deserts. At the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, we reaffirmed the crucial importance of cooperative family planning efforts to long-term sustainable development.

Here in America, we have worked to clean up a record number of our toxic dumps, and we intend to clean 500 more over the next four years. We have passed new laws to better protect our water, created new national parks and monuments and worked to harmonize our efforts for environmental protection, economic growth and social improvement, aided by the Council on Sustainable Development.

Yesterday, I announced the most far-reaching efforts to improve air quality in our nation in 20 years, cutting smog levels dramatically and, for the first time ever, setting standards to lower the levels of the fine particles in the atmosphere that form soot. In America, the incidence of childhood asthma has been increasing rapidly and is now the single biggest reason our children are hospitalized. These measures will help to change that, to improve the health of people of all ages and to prevent as many as 15,000 premature deaths a year.

Still, we here have much more to do, especially in reducing America's contribution to global climate change.

The science is clear and compelling: we humans are changing the global climate. Concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at their highest

levels in more than 200,000 years and climbing sharply. If the trend does not change, scientists expect the seas to rise two feet or more over the next century. In America, that means 9,000 square miles of Florida, Louisiana and other coastal areas will be flooded. In Asia, 17 per cent of Bangladesh, land on which 6 million people now live, will be lost. Island chains such as the Maldives will disappear from the map unless we reverse the predictions.

Climate changes will disrupt agriculture, cause severe droughts and floods and the spread of infectious diseases, which will be a big enough problem for us under the best of circumstances in the twenty-first century. There could be 50 million or more cases a year of malaria. We can expect more deaths from heat stress; just two years ago, here in the United States, in the city of Chicago, we saw the tragedy of more than 400 of our citizens dying during a severe heat wave.

No nation can escape this danger; none can evade its responsibility to confront it. We must all do our part — industrial nations that emit the largest quantities of greenhouse gases today, and developing nations, whose greenhouse gas emissions are growing rapidly. I applaud the European Union for its strong focus on this issue and the World Bank for setting environmental standards for projects it will finance in the developing world.

Here in the United States we must do better. With 4 per cent of the world's population, we already produce more than 20 per cent of its greenhouse gases. Frankly, our record since Rio is not sufficient. We have been blessed with high rates of growth and millions of new jobs over the past few years, but that has led to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions in spite of the adoption of new conservation practices. So we must do better, and we will.

The air quality action I took yesterday is a positive first step, but more must follow. In order to reduce greenhouse gases and grow the economy, we must invest more in the technologies of the future. I am directing my Cabinet to work to develop them. Government, universities, business and labour must work together. All these efforts must be sustained over years, indeed over decades. As Vice-President Gore said on Monday,

> "Sustainable development requires sustained commitment".

With that commitment, we can succeed.

We must create new technologies and develop new strategies, like emissions trading, that will both curtail pollution and support continued economic growth. We in the developed world owe that to ourselves and equally to those in the developing nations. Many of the technologies that will help us to meet the new air quality standards in America can also help us to address climate change. This is a challenge we must undertake immediately and one in which I plan personally to play a critical role.

In the United States, in order to do our part, we must first convince the American people and the Congress that the climate change problem is real and imminent. I will convene a White House conference on climate change later this year to lay the scientific facts before our people so that they understand that we must act, and the economic facts so that they understand the benefits and the costs. With the best ideas and strategies, with new technologies, increased productivity and energy efficiency, we can turn this challenge to our advantage. We will work with our people, and we will bring to the Kyoto Conference a strong American commitment to realistic and binding limits that will significantly reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases.

I want to mention briefly three other initiatives that we are taking to deal with climate change and to advance sustainable development here and beyond our borders.

First, to help developing nations reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the United States will provide $1 billion in assistance over the next five years to support energy efficiency, develop alternative energy sources and improve resource management to promote growth that does not have an adverse effect on the climate.

Secondly, we will do more to encourage private investment to meet environmental standards. Our Overseas Private Investment Corporation will now require that its projects adhere to new and strengthened environmental guidelines, just as our Export-Import Bank already does, and as I hope our allies and friends soon will. Common guidelines for responsible investment clearly would lead to more sustainable growth in developing nations.

Thirdly, we must increase our use of new technologies even as we move to develop more new technologies. Already we are working with our automobile industry to produce cars by early in the next century that are three times as fuel-efficient as today's vehicles. Now we will work with businesses and

communities to use the sun's energy to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels by installing solar panels on one million more roofs around our nation by 2010. Capturing the sun's warmth can help us to turn down the Earth's temperature.

In all of our cultures, we have been taught from time immemorial that, as Scripture says,

> "One generation passes away and another comes, but the Earth abides forever." (*The Holy Bible, Ecclesiastes, 1:4*)

We must strengthen our stewardship of the environment to make that true, and to ensure that, when this generation passes, the young man who spoke just before me, and all those of his generation, will inherit a rich and abundant Earth.

**The President:** I thank the President of the United States of America for his statement.

*Mr. William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, was escorted from the rostrum.*

*The meeting rose at 6.40 p.m.*